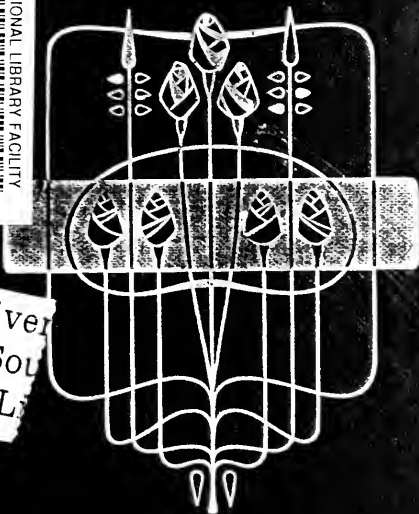


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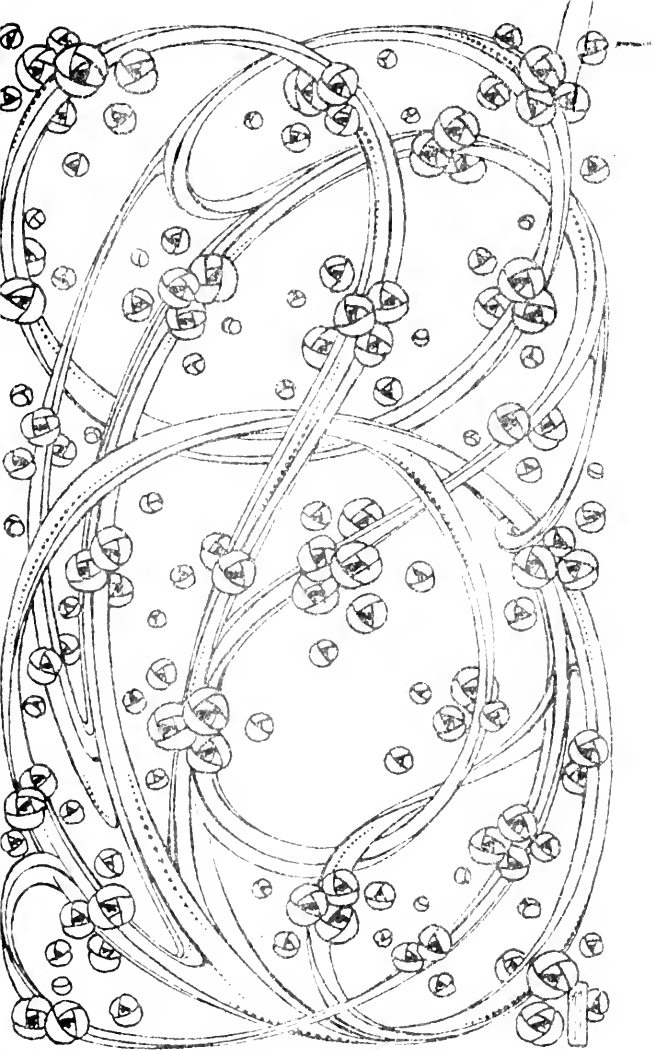


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JOHNSON'S TABLE TALK





JOHNSON'S TABLE TALK



A · SELECTION · OF
HIS · MAIN · TOPICS
AND · OPINIONS · TAKEN
FROM · BOSWELL'S 'LIFE'
AND · ARRANGED · BY
W. A. LEWIS · BETTANY



BLACKIE · & · SON · LD · LONDON

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Introduction

The most famous biography in the English language has been subjected to more than one essay in condensation : that recently introduced to the world by Mr. Chesterton is only the latest of a long series of abridgments. An endeavour has even been made—an endeavour countenanced by no less acute a critic than George Henry Lewes—to wrest from their setting the various anecdotes and conversations recorded by Boswell, and to constitute them the basis of a new and much shorter *Life of Johnson*. But, so far as I know, Boswell's great work is still awaiting what Richardson would call its "Index Historical and Characteristical". The present volume will perhaps obviate the necessity of preparing such an index ; at any rate it may claim to rank unique among books derived from Boswell as being one in which an attempt is made to disentangle the great moralist's utterances from the disciple's narrative, and to arrange them in such a synthesis as shall afford something

approaching to a true conspectus of Johnsonian opinion. When all allowances have been made, and all compliments paid, when the standard *Life of Johnson* has been praised for its piquant and malicious "Ana" of distinguished persons, for its Pepys-like revelation of its author's vanities and foibles, as well as for its invaluable view of late eighteenth-century literature and literary men, it must be admitted to base its surest title to immortality on that marvellous collection of its subject's conversations and correspondence which it incorporates. True, Johnson's philosophy is expressed in more formal and deliberate fashion in his satires and in his essays. But *London* is a mere academic exercise in *sæva indignatio*; *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, for all its intensity of moral fervour, retains many crabbed and many commonplace lines. In both poems, indeed, Johnson falls as far behind Pope in pungency as he sinks below Goldsmith in pathos: he is pompous rather than majestic, affected instead of being affecting, and his "constant epithets" are the least of his offences. *The Rambler* and *The Idler* afford a mass of sound morality and of weighty common sense, but their declamatory periods, their cumbrous and inelastic diction, their exhibition of "humours", and their reliance on the convention of classical or of

Eastern allegory, render them desperately alien from modern taste and sympathy. While *Rasselas*—a romance which has neither story to tell nor characters to develop—contains such a definitive statement of Johnson's manly but melancholy creed as makes it little better than a sermon in disguise. No doubt, then, that he who would know Johnson's view of the eternal verities must listen to the discourses of *The Idler* and of *The Rambler*, and make the acquaintance of *Rasselas*, of *Imlac*, and of *Nekayah*. But he who seeks no solution of the riddle of the painful earth, he who merely looks for counsel on the conduct of this present life, will turn from the history of Prince *Rasselas* to the *Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, and so turning, will find in the unflagging wit and vivacity of James Boswell's "Real Conversations" ample recompense for their avoidance of reasoned philosophy and of gnostic solemnity.

About these conversations two questions will naturally be asked: Are they typical of the average talk of Johnson? Do they fairly represent the topics on which he was wont to discourse? Or are they mere records of his deliverances on subjects carefully introduced by Boswell? The second question is: How explain the fact that of a society which con-

tained men of such intellectual eminence as Burke, Fox, Gibbon, Sheridan, and Goldsmith, the minutes should show Johnson absolutely predominant in conversation, and every other person merely making up his audience? Neither question allows of a very conclusive answer. It must be remembered that though Boswell's intimacy with Johnson extended over a period of nearly twenty-two years—from 1763 to 1784,—during eight of these years master and disciple never met. Boswell's visits to Johnson were generally paid in the spring vacation of the Scotch courts, which lasted from March 12th to June 12th. All these spring meetings—which took place in 1763, 1766, 1768, 1772, 1773, 1775, 1776, 1778, 1779, 1781, 1783, and 1784,—as well as the autumn meetings of 1769 and 1779, occurred in London. But in the autumn of 1773 Boswell met Johnson in Edinburgh and conducted him on the famous tour to the Hebrides, while in September, 1777, the two men came together at Ashbourne, where they had visited Johnson's old friend, Dr. Taylor, in the previous year. It seems, then, not unreasonable to hold that the interrupted character of this intimacy—an intimacy which Croker estimates at a total intercourse of only 276 days—tells somewhat against the view that regards the conversations as ab-

both by Gibbon and by Johnson. Gibbon remarks "that Mr. Fox could not be afraid of Mr. Johnson, yet he certainly was very shy of saying anything in Dr. Johnson's presence". Johnson himself throws out two rather contradictory suggestions on this subject. In one place he expresses his acquiescence in an application to Fox of what was said of Alcibiades by Eupolis: "True, he can talk, and yet he is no speaker", and at a later date he says that "Fox never talks in private company because he has not the first motion. A man who is used to the applause of the House of Commons has no wish for that of a private company." The only occasion on which Burke is copiously represented in Boswell's pages is recorded in the account of the Club meeting of April 3rd, 1778, at which the subjects discussed are Sculpture, Emigration, and Parliamentary speaking; and the sole explanation of the great orator's general silence is that which he himself has afforded. Bennet Langton, in that collection of Johnson's sayings for 1780 with which he supplied Boswell, says that he "recollects having passed an evening with both Burke and Johnson, when Mr. Burke repeatedly entered upon topics which it was evident he would have illustrated with extensive knowledge and richness of expression" had not "Johnson

always seized upon the conversation". On the way home Burke observed that "Johnson had been very great that night". Langton agreed, but added he could have wished to hear more from another person, plainly intimating that he meant Mr. Burke. "Oh, no," said Mr. Burke, "it is enough for me to have rung the bell to him!"

The problem of Johnson's absolute monarchy at the Club we may then resolve somewhat as follows. His venerable age and his reputation as a moralist—founded on *The Rambler* and on *Rasselas*—gave him the initial advantage in conversation, and this advantage he maintained and increased by an unrivalled fertility, eloquence, and humour. Utterly unscrupulous in enforcing and strengthening a position, Johnson would play the bully, the cynic, the derisive laughter, or the sophist, just as occasion required. In his early life he had often resorted to the *argumentum ad baculum*, he had walked the streets all night with the ruffianly Savage, he had interviewed street-walkers and drunk with them, he had rubbed shoulders with Covent Garden porters, and bandied obscene retorts with bargees. So that he was not the man, once his blood was up, who could be expected to pay a tender regard to an opponent's feelings. Utterly courageous

and thick-skinned himself, Johnson could make no allowance for the absence of these qualities in other persons, and in any public discussion he talked solely with a view to victory. What was the good of men who had daily occupations to mind attempting to compete with a rival who, during the last years of his life, practically devoted his whole time to talking? Accessible to any decently-bred and properly-introduced person, ready indeed as he was to break down all formal barriers of social intercourse, Johnson may be described as the Hackenschmidt of conversation, prepared to take on all comers at a moment's notice. "Inspired idiots" like Goldsmith and Boswell fell an easy prey to such a gladiator. Famous authors and learned professors were too wise to risk their reputations in a combat with him. And even orators like Fox and Burke, bishops such as Percy and Barnard, were shy of engaging in a second tussle with so redoubtable a champion. For Johnson's very defects helped him to maintain his supremacy. He was blind of one eye and short-sighted of the other, so the beauties of nature and of art were nothing to him. "Never heed such nonsense", he would say, "as this cant about prospects and charms of nature; a blade of grass is always a blade of grass, whether in one country or another."

And his "scorn of painting was such", says Mrs. Thrale, "that I have heard him say that he would sit very quietly in a room hung round with the works of the greatest masters, and never feel the slightest disposition to turn them if their backs were outermost, unless it might be for the sake of telling Sir Joshua that he *had* turned them". His hearing was so bad that for quite a dozen years before his death he could take not the slightest pleasure in the playhouse, while for music he had so little taste that he would sooner have heard Boswell whistle a Scotch tune than have sat through one of Handel's oratorios. To the higher harmonies of prose and of poetry he was equally deaf. He liked Shakespeare, not for his poetry, but for his knowledge of human nature. He alleged that Milton could not write a sonnet, and condemned *Lycidas* and *Samson Agonistes*. He failed to appreciate either the satire of Swift or the irony of Fielding; and for the soaring eloquence of Burke he seems to have cared as little as for the stately periods of Gibbon. Hume he confessed that he had never read. With Johnson, indeed, everything must needs be measured by the rule of accepted convention and of common sense. The result was that anything strange or out of the common in any department of

life or of letters, anything signifying revolt or tinged with rapture or with enthusiasm, was to him anathema. The great Methodist movement, the humour of *Tristram Shandy*, the "goodness of heart" preached in *Tom Jones*, the beginnings of the romantic revival foreshadowed by *Ossian* and by Gray, the efforts of "an oppressed nation bravely struggling to be free"—the words are Boswell's, not Gladstone's,—all these signs of the coming liberation of the human spirit were regarded with the gravest suspicion by a man who, entertaining more than the average 'Tory's objection to chatter about abstract principles and capital-lettered virtues, was up in arms at the slightest motion to impugn the settled order of things human or things divine.

Johnson, indeed, it must be confessed, was neither more nor less than a Philistine. Yet in his conversations with men of finer taste and of more extended views this very Philistinism must have helped in no small measure to secure him victory. Even the limitations of a man of genius and of strong convictions are impressive. And Johnson's unique power of ridiculing anything he disliked—sheer bludgeon-work, as it must be called—was always used to its utmost strength. It performed a double function, it both amused and bemused

his opponents. . . . Hawkins had written a *History of the Science and Practice of Music* (like Boswell, he quotes himself in his *Life of Johnson*); Burney was both an historian of music and a musical composer; Burke had published an *Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*; Gibbon had, in his *Decline and Fall*, given to history just that colouring and philosophic idea which Johnson so intolerantly pooh-poohed; and Goldsmith, who had the audacity to pen a glowing appreciation of the "infidel" Voltaire, had expounded in *The Bee* and in *The Citizen of the World* many of those liberal ideas, of the solid good sense of the "PEOPLE", of the comparative unimportance of religious dogma, which his friend consistently attacked as no less nonsensical than anarchical. When we add to such names those of Beauclerk, a connoisseur, and of Reynolds, a great practitioner of the arts, we have furnished a list of men who, if they had been ready enough, or rough enough, could have given Johnson many a *mauvais quart d'heure* on the subject of his æsthetic heresies. But just as the average decently-bred man shuns a quarrel with a cabman or a collision with a chimney-sweep—Johnson admitted that he had no such qualms—so these younger and more cultured members of the Club were men

of too fastidious a taste and of too timid a spirit to challenge Johnson on these questions of music and of the arts. They did not care to talk on favourite topics to one who would probably have ridiculed or browbeaten them. They knew that "a man may be in as just possession of truth as of a city, and yet be forced to surrender"; and they seem to have agreed with Dr. Browne that it was "far better to enjoy truth with peace than to hazard her on a battle". Johnson, indeed, on all questions of conversation and of social intercourse, must be allowed to claim the benefit of his own merciful judgment on inconsistency of "Precept and Practice". He started talking, it may be presumed, with a resolve to conform to his own not-too-exalted standards of courtesy and of good-breeding. But his schoolmaster's experience and his Grub-Street training both militated against the carrying out of such a resolve; while his cold and insolent incredulity, and his lack of that Whitmanesque respect for men *qua* men which is one of the charmingly modern traits in Goldsmith's character, caused him to act on many occasions with a brutality that might easily be mistaken for stark insensibility. A disputant who could tell the amiable and dignified Sir Joshua that he was drunk, who retorted with almost equal insolence

on such mild-mannered men as Dr. Burney and Dr. Barnard, who repaid Mrs. Thrale for twenty years of kindness with the astounding letter he wrote her in the matter of Piozzi, and who, when he was called a puppy by his mother, was guilty of the appalling *impictas* of asking her if she knew what they called a puppy's mother—a disputant of this sort may fairly be said to have been liable at times to forget moral responsibility and common decency. And when we remember, too, how addicted Johnson was (despite his denunciation of it in other persons) to the practice of "talking to make people stare", how fond he ever showed himself of the trick of uttering uncomfortable truths and of condemning conventional white lies; how, for all his invectives against lying and exaggeration, he was never so pleased as when enunciating some disconcerting but carefully-guarded paradox, we are bound to conclude that the "scrupulous politeness" which he claimed as his own was practically indistinguishable from another man's shocking rudeness.

Much, however, can be said in palliation of this roughness. His native irritability, his constitutional melancholy, his insomnia which only opium could alleviate, his long struggle with poverty, his conflict with his own indo-

lence, his exposure as one of the admitted "sights of London" to the impertinent curiosity of any presentable fool who chose to make his acquaintance—all these are factors which must be taken into consideration in any judgment we pass on Johnson's conversational methods. And on the other hand we must set his lofty independence, his ardent love of truth, his lambent play of humour, his deep knowledge of men and women, his persistent intellectual curiosity, and his tender and Christ-like humanity. Johnson was indeed a great Christian, a very reasonable and a truly charitable Christian. He was a "man of the world" in the true sense of that much-abused phrase. Severe in scrutinizing his own life, he had no notion of rendering virtue too hard for other persons. Vows and scruples he abhorred, and he was never tired of urging his friends to keep the balance even between lax conduct and sheer methodism. Fond, too, as he was of venting a certain humorous dislike of excisemen and of attorneys, of players and of Scotchmen, the sweeping condemnation of whole classes of the community generally stirred his disgust; and Swift's bitter gibes at doctors and at servants may perhaps be held responsible for a good deal of that animosity which Johnson always displayed in

speaking of the Dean. There is a passage in *The Rambler* dealing with servants which should be placed side by side with part of an essay in Hazlitt's *Table-Talk* concerned with the same theme. Johnson, who hated low life and coarse expressions, is resolute in declaring that "the highest panegyrick that private virtue can receive is the praise of servants". While Hazlitt, just because he repudiates the Johnsonian doctrine of "subordination", and wishes to "level" society up and down, can find in servants no traits of common humanity, and with a morbid and almost diabolical ingenuity charges on them all the meannesses and dishonesties that can disgrace our nature. Johnson, in fact, though he loved to use the microscope on his friends, was averse from probing deep into men and women just to see what was inside them. He admired Richardson, but he had probably little sympathy with that feminist's use of the "human document"; and his own knowledge of humanity was derived not from vivisection but from sympathy. His religious belief was, however, fixed not on men but on God; the bare notion of trusting in the "PEOPLE", or of respecting the "PEOPLE", would have struck him as sheer Rousseauistic cant. Yet his character bears no trace of the misanthrope, and even his Toryism seems to have been

almost as much a matter of sentiment as of political faith. He loathed the Whigs in great measure because he thought them systematically cruel to the poor. He hated the Americans as being nigger-drivers who had the effrontery to "yelp for liberty". (Perhaps the great preacher's condonation of slavery was one of Johnson's reasons for belittling Whitefield.) And when the Irish Corn Laws were in agitation, and a friend ventured to observe that these laws—which enabled the Irish to feed themselves—might be prejudicial to the English corn trade, he denounced his language as worthy only of a savage. The truth is that Johnson—who cared not a straw for the RIGHTS OF MAN—who, indeed, may be said to have originated that Calvinistic contempt for man as a weak, feckless, unhappy creature, which Carlyle was never tired of expressing—was ever most ready to lend an attentive ear to the claims of humanity,—so long as he was asked to relieve material and not merely sentimental distress. Never lived there a man of letters who was so prepared to give assistance to his fellow-workers, whether it were a matter of revising poems or of writing prefaces, of procuring work or of lending money. Never was there a benefactor so kind and patient to those he benefited as Dr. Johnson,

witness his treatment of the quaint menagerie he kept at Bolt Court. The stories told of him by Boswell, of his going out himself to buy oysters for his cat Hodge, of his custom when he dined out of always sending in some delicacy for Miss Williams, of his carrying home on his back and taking care of a poor woman of the town whom he found ill in the street—these stories have made Johnson's unconquerable humanity as famous as his retorts and repartees. To him, indeed, nothing that God had made was common or unclean. And if he was constantly imposed on, as Sir John Hawkins gleefully declares, what matters that? Sir John, indeed, is singularly unfortunate in his comments on Johnson's beneficence. Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike, he has in one memorable sentence at once gibbeted his own savagery and raised an eternal monument to Johnson's tenderness of heart. "He had a natural imbecility about him," says the Pharisaic Hawkins, "arising from humanity and pity to the sufferings of his fellow-creatures, that was prejudicial to his interests." "Natural imbecility"! Doubtless Judas, who kept the bag, must often have deplored his Master's "natural imbecility", and have regarded it as deeply prejudicial to the Messiah's best interests. . . . Johnson's "natural imbecility"!

Let us accept the phrase: for Johnson, in an impartial view, was in truth burdened with not a single but a double portion of 'natural imbecility', with a weakness for talking brutally and for acting tenderly. He had early made it his concern to pierce through fallacies and to grasp realities; and in a world that loves to hover between shallow cynicism and flabby sentimentalism his whole life was one long struggle to maintain a fitting equipoise of intellect and of emotion. Neither in his personal experience nor in his religious creed could he discover any justification for that vague and comfortable optimism which Sterne and Goldsmith professed. Wherefore, finding life inevitably unhappy and man incurably frail, he conceived his business of moralist to consist in two contrary but not contradictory duties, that of exposing the weakness and of denouncing the sin, that of sheltering the weak and of succouring the sinner. These twin duties—to his eternal credit be it said—Samuel Johnson scrupulously and unremittingly fulfilled, for while he was ever ready to mitigate the asperity of his tongue by the liberality of his hand, he was equally prepared, as the following pages will abundantly demonstrate, to compound, as it were, for performing a kindly action by following it with a scathing retort.

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The Importance of Truthfulness

INACCURACY OF NARRATION

In the Preface [to his Abridgment and Translation of Lobo's *Voyage to Abyssinia*] the Johnsonian style begins to appear; and though use had not yet taught his wing a permanent and equable flight, there are parts of it which exhibit his best manner in full vigour. I had once the pleasure of examining it with Mr. Edmund Burke, who confirmed me in this opinion, by his superior critical sagacity, and was, I remember, much delighted with the following specimen:—

“The Portuguese traveller, contrary to the general vein of his countrymen, has amused his reader with no romantic absurdity, or incredible fictions; whatever he relates, whether true or not, is at least probable; and he who tells nothing exceeding the bounds of probability, has a right to demand that they should believe him who cannot contradict him.

“He appears by his modest and unaffected narration to have described things as he saw them, to have copied nature from the life, and to have consulted his senses, not his imagination. He meets with no basilisks that destroy with their eyes, his crocodiles devour their prey without tears, and his cataracts fall from the rocks without deafening the neighbouring inhabitants.

“The reader will here find no regions cursed with irremediable barrenness, or blest with spontaneous fecundity; no perpetual gloom, or unceasing sunshine; nor are the nations here described, either devoid of all sense of humanity, or consummate in all private or social virtues. Here are no Hottentots without religious policy or inarticulate language; no Chinese perfectly polite, and completely skilled in all sciences; he will discover, what will always be discovered by a diligent and impartial enquirer, that wherever human nature is to be found there is a mixture of vice and virtue, a contest of passion and reason; and that the Creator doth not appear partial in his distributions, but has balanced, in most countries, their particular inconveniences by particular favours.”

Here we have an early example of that brilliant and energetic expression, which, upon innumerable occasions in his subsequent life, justly impressed the world with the highest admiration.

—*The Life*. 1735.

One evening at Mrs. Montagu's, where a

splendid company was assembled, consisting of the most eminent literary characters, I thought he seemed highly pleased with the respect and attention that were shown him, and asked him, on our return home, if he was not highly gratified by his visit: "No, Sir," said he, "not highly gratified; yet I do not recollect to have passed many evenings *with fewer objections*."

—*The Life*. 1770. Dr. Maxwell's *Collectanea*.

On Thursday, April 8, I sat a good part of the evening with him, but he was very silent. He said, "Burnet's *History of his Own Times* is very entertaining. The style, indeed, is mere chit-chat. I do not believe that Burnet intentionally lied; but he was so much prejudiced that he took no pains to find out the truth. He was like a man who resolves to regulate his time by a certain watch, but will not enquire whether the watch is right or not."

—*The Life*. 1773, April 8th.

JOHNSON: "Nay, don't give us India. That puts me in mind of Montesquieu, who is really a fellow of genius too in many respects; whenever he wants to support a strange opinion, he quotes you the practice of Japan or of some other distant country, of which he knows nothing. To support polygamy, he tells you of the island of Formosa, where there are ten women born for one man. He had but to suppose another island, where there are ten men born for one woman, and so make a marriage between them." —*The Tour*. 1773, Sept. 14th.

We were shown, in a corner of this vault, a hole, into which Col said greater criminals used to be put. It was now filled up with rubbish of different kinds. He said, it was of a great depth. "Ay," said Dr. Johnson, smiling, "all such places, that *are filled up*, were of a great depth." He is very quick in showing that he does not give credit to careless or exaggerated accounts of things. After seeing the castle, we looked at a small hut near it. It is called *Teigh Franchich*, i.e. the Frenchman's House. Col could not tell us the history of it. A poor man with a wife and children now lived in it. We went into it, and Dr. Johnson gave them some charity. There was but one bed for all the family, and the hut was very smoky. When he came out, he said to me, "*Et hoc secundum sententiam philosophorum est esse beatus.*" BOSWELL: "The philosophers, when they placed happiness in a cottage, supposed cleanliness and no smoke". JOHNSON: "Sir, they did not think about either".

—*The Tour.* 1773, Oct. 6th.

I mentioned that I had heard Dr. Solander say he was a Swedish Laplander. JOHNSON: "Sir, I don't believe he is a Laplander. The Laplanders are not much above four feet high. He is as tall as you; and he has not the copper colour of a Laplander." BOSWELL: "But what motive could he have to make himself a Laplander?" JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, he must either mean the word Laplander in a very extensive sense, or may mean a voluntary degradation of

himself. 'For all my being the great man that you see me now, I was originally a Barbarian'; as if Burke should say, 'I came over a wild Irishman',—which he might say in his present state of exaltation."

—*The Tour*. 1773, Oct. 18th.

He said, "The value of every story depends on its being true. A story is a picture either of an individual or of human nature in general; if it be false, it is a picture of nothing. For instance: suppose a man should tell that Johnson, before setting out for Italy, as he had to cross the Alps, sat down to make himself wings. This many people would believe; but it would be a picture of nothing. * * * * (naming a worthy friend of ours) used to think a story a story, till I showed him that truth was essential to it." I observed, that Foote entertained us with stories which were not true; but that, indeed, it was properly not as narratives that Foote's stories pleased us, but as collections of ludicrous images. JOHNSON: "Foote is quite impartial, for he tells lies of everybody".

The importance of strict and scrupulous veracity cannot be too often inculcated. Johnson was known to be so rigidly attentive to it, that even in his common conversation the slightest circumstance was mentioned with exact precision. The knowledge of his having such a principle and habit made his friends have a perfect reliance on the truth of everything that he told, however it might have been doubted if told by many others. As an in-

stance of this, I may mention an odd incident which he related as having happened to him one night in Fleet Street: "A gentlewoman," said he, "begged I would give her my arm to assist her in crossing the street, which I accordingly did; upon which she offered me a shilling, supposing me to be the watchman. I perceived that she was somewhat in liquor." This, if told by most people, would have been thought an invention; when told by Johnson, it was believed by his friends as much as if they had seen what passed.

—*The Life*. 1776, March 16th.

I gave him an account of a conversation which had passed between me and Captain Cook, the day before, at dinner, at Sir John Pringle's; and he was much pleased with the conscientious accuracy of that celebrated circumnavigator, who set me right as to many of the exaggerated accounts given by Dr. Hawkesworth of his voyages. I told him that while I was with the Captain I catch'd the enthusiasm of curiosity and adventure, and felt a strong inclination to go with him on his next voyage. JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, a man *does* feel so, till he considers how very little he can learn from such voyages". BOSWELL: "But one is carried away with the general grand and indistinct notion of A VOYAGE ROUND THE WORLD". JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir; but a man is to guard himself against taking a thing in general". I said I was certain that a great part of what we are told by travellers to the South Sea might

be conjecture, because they had not enough of the language of those countries to understand so much as they have related. Objects falling under the observation of the senses must be clearly known; but everything intellectual, everything abstract—politics, morals, and religion—must be darkly guessed. Dr. Johnson was of the same opinion. He, upon another occasion, when a friend mentioned to him several extraordinary facts, as communicated to him by the circumnavigators, silyly observed, “Sir, I never before knew how much I was respected by these gentlemen; they told *me* none of these things.”

—*The Life*. 1776, April 3rd.

He would not allow me to praise a lady then at Bath; observing, “She does not gain upon me, Sir; I think her empty-headed.” He was, indeed, a stern critic upon characters and manners. Even Mrs. Thrale did not escape his friendly animadversion at times. When he and I were one day endeavouring to ascertain, article by article, how one of our friends could possibly spend as much money in his family as he told us he did, she interrupted us by a lively extravagant sally, on the expense of clothing his children, describing it in a very ludicrous and fanciful manner. Johnson looked a little angry, and said, “Nay, Madam, when you are declaiming, declaim; and when you are calculating, calculate.” At another time, when she said, perhaps affectedly, “I don’t like to fly.”—JOHNSON: “With *your*

wings, Madam, you *must* fly: but have a care, there are *clippers* abroad". How very well was this said, and how fully has experience proved the truth of it; but have they not *clipped* rather *rudely*, and gone a great deal closer than was necessary? —*The Life*. 1776, April 26th.

On Sunday evening, Sept. 14, I arrived at Ashbourne, and drove directly up to Dr. Taylor's door; Dr. Johnson and he appeared before I got out of the post-chaise, and welcomed me cordially.

I told them that I had travelled all the preceding night, and gone to bed at Leek in Staffordshire; and that when I rose to go to church in the afternoon I was informed there had been an earthquake, of which, it seems, the shock had been felt in some degree at Ashbourne. JOHNSON: "Sir, it will be much exaggerated in popular talk: for, in the first place, the common people do not accurately adapt their thoughts to the objects; nor, secondly, do they accurately adapt their words to their thoughts: they do not mean to lie; but, taking no pains to be exact, they give you very false accounts. A great part of their language is proverbial. If anything rocks at all, they say *it rocks like a cradle*; and in this way they go on." —*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 14th.

I had before dinner repeated a ridiculous story told me by an old man, who had been a passenger with me in the stage-coach to-day. Mrs. Thrale having taken occasion to allude to

it, in talking to me, called it "The story told you by the old *woman*".—"Now, Madam," said I, "give me leave to catch you in the fact: it was not an old *woman*, but an old *man*, whom I mentioned as having told me this." I presumed to take an opportunity, in presence of Johnson, of showing this lively lady how ready she was, unintentionally, to deviate from exact authenticity of narration.

—*The Li'e.* 1778, March 30th.

Next morning, while we were at breakfast, Johnson gave a very earnest recommendation of what he himself practised with the utmost conscientiousness: I mean a strict attention to truth, even in the most minute particulars. "Accustom your children," said he, "constantly to this; if a thing happened at one window, and they, when relating it, say that it happened at another, do not let it pass, but instantly check them; you do not know where deviation from truth will end." BOSWELL: "It may come to the door: and when once an account is at all varied in one circumstance, it may by degrees be varied so as to be totally different from what really happened". Our lively hostess, whose fancy was impatient of the rein, fidgeted at this, and ventured to say, "Nay, this is too much. If Mr. Johnson should forbid me to drink tea, I would comply, as I should feel the restraint only twice a day; but little variations in narrative must happen a thousand times a day, if one is not perpetually watching." JOHNSON: "Well, Madam, and

you *ought* to be perpetually watching. It is more from carelessness about truth than from intentional lying, that there is so much falsehood in the world."

In his review of Dr. Warton's "Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope", Johnson has given the following salutary caution upon this subject:—"Nothing but experience could evince the frequency of false information, or enable any man to conceive that so many groundless reports should be propagated, as every man of eminence may hear of himself. Some men relate what they think, as what they know; some men of confused memories and habitual inaccuracy, ascribe to one man what belongs to another; and some talk on, without thought or care. A few men are sufficient to broach falsehoods, which are afterwards innocently diffused by successive relaters." Had he lived to read what Sir John Hawkins and Mrs. Piozzi have related concerning himself, how much would he have found his observation illustrated. He was indeed so much impressed with the prevalence of falsehood, voluntary or unintentional, that I never knew any person who, upon hearing an extraordinary circumstance told, discovered more of the *incredulus odi*. He would say, with a significant look and decisive tone, "It is not so. Do not tell this again." He inculcated upon all his friends the importance of perpetual vigilance against the slightest degrees of falsehood; the effect of which, as Sir Joshua Reynolds observed to me, has been, that all who were of his *school*

are distinguished for a love of truth and accuracy, which they would not have possessed in the same degree, if they had not been acquainted with Johnson.

—*The Life*. 1778, March 31st.

JOHNSON: "I have been reading Thicknesse's 'Travels', which I think are entertaining".

BOSWELL: "What, Sir, a good book?"

JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, to read once; I do not say you are to make a study of it, and digest it; and I believe it to be a true book in his intention.

All travellers generally mean to tell truth; though Thicknesse observes, upon Smollett's account of his alarming a whole town in France by firing a blunderbuss, and frightening a French nobleman till he made him tie on his portmanteau, that he would be loth to say Smollett had told two lies in one page; but he had found the only town in France where these things could have happened. Travellers must often be mistaken. In everything, except where mensuration can be applied, they may honestly differ. There has been, of late, a strange turn in travellers to be displeased."

—*The Life*. 1778, April 3rd.

He talked to me with serious concern of a certain female friend's "laxity of narration, and inattention to truth".—"I am as much vexed," said he, "at the ease with which she hears it mentioned to her, as at the thing itself. I told her, 'Madam, you are contented to hear every day said to you, what the highest of mankind

have died for, rather than bear.' You know, Sir, the highest of mankind have died rather than bear to be told they have uttered a falsehood. Do talk to her of it: I am weary."

BOSWELL: "Was not Dr. John Campbell a very inaccurate man in his narrative, Sir? He once told me, that he drank thirteen bottles of port at a sitting." JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, I do not know that Campbell ever lied with pen and ink; but you could not entirely depend on anything that he told you in conversation, if there was fact mixed with it. However, I loved Campbell; he was a solid orthodox man; he had a reverence for religion. Though defective in practice, he was religious in principle; and he did nothing grossly wrong that I have heard."

—*The Life*. 1778, April 7th.

I read him a letter from Dr. Hugh Blair concerning Pope, in writing whose life he was now employed.

JOHNSON: "Depend upon it, Sir, this is too strongly stated. Pope may have had from Bolingbroke the philosophic *stamina* of his Essay; and admitting this to be true, Lord Bathurst did not intentionally falsify. But the thing is not true in the latitude that Blair seems to imagine; we are sure that the poetical imagery, which makes a great part of the poem, was Pope's own. It is amazing, Sir, what deviations there are from precise truth, in the account which is given of almost everything. I told Mrs. Thrale, 'You have so little anxiety about truth, that you never tax your memory

with the exact thing.' Now, what is the use of the memory to truth, if one is careless of exactness? Lord Hailes's *Annals of Scotland* are very exact; but they contain mere dry particulars. They are to be considered as a Dictionary. You know such things are there; and may be looked at when you please. Robertson paints; but the misfortune is, you are sure he does not know the people whom he paints; so you cannot suppose a likeness. Characters should never be given by an historian, unless he knew the people whom he describes, or copies from those who knew them."

—*The Life*. 1779, Oct. 10th.

Mrs. Thrale gave high praise to Mr. Dudley Long (now North). JOHNSON: "Nay, my dear lady, don't talk so. Mr. Long's character is very *short*. It is nothing. He fills a chair. He is a man of genteel appearance, and that is all. I know nobody who blasts by praise as you do: for whenever there is exaggerated praise, everybody is set against a character. They are provoked to attack it. Now there is Pepys; you praised that man with such disproportion, that I was incited to lessen him, perhaps more than he deserves. His blood is upon your head. By the same principle, your malice defeats itself; for your censure is too violent. And yet," looking to her with a leering smile, "she is the first woman in the world, could she but restrain that wicked tongue of hers; she would be the only woman, could she but command that little whirligig."

Upon the subject of exaggerated praise I took the liberty to say, that I thought there might be very high praise given to a known character which deserved it, and therefore it would not be exaggerated. Thus, one might say of Mr. Edmund Burke, he is a very wonderful man. JOHNSON: "No, Sir, you would not be safe, if another man had a mind perversely to contradict. He might answer, 'Where is all the wonder? Burke is, to be sure, a man of uncommon abilities, with a great quantity of matter in his mind, and a great fluency of language in his mouth. But we are not to be stunned and astonished by him.' So you see, Sir, even Burke would suffer, not from any fault of his own, but from your folly."

—*The Life.* 1781, April 1st.

On Sunday, March 23, I breakfasted with Dr. Johnson, who seemed much relieved, having taken opium the night before. He, however, protested against it, as a remedy that should be given with the utmost reluctance, and only in extreme necessity. I mentioned how commonly it was used in Turkey, and that therefore it could not be so pernicious as he apprehended. He grew warm, and said, "Turks take opium, and Christians take opium; but Russel, in his account of Aleppo, tells us, that it is as disgraceful in Turkey to take too much opium, as it is with us to get drunk. Sir, it is amazing how things are exaggerated. A gentleman was lately telling, in a company where I was present, that in France, as soon as a man of fashion marries,

he takes an opera girl into keeping ; and this he mentioned as a general custom. ‘Pray, Sir,’ said I, ‘how many opera girls may there be?’ He answered, ‘about fourscore’. ‘Well then, Sir,’ said I, ‘you see there can be no more than fourscore men of fashion who can do this.’”

—*The Life*. 1783, March 23rd.

Talking of an acquaintance of ours, whose narratives, which abounded in curious and interesting topics, were unhappily found to be very fabulous, I mentioned Lord Mansfield’s having said to me, “Suppose we believe one *half* of what he tells.” JOHNSON: “Ay ; but we don’t know *which* half to believe. By his lying we lose not only our reverence for him, but all comfort in his conversation.” BOSWELL: “May we not take it as amusing fiction?” JOHNSON: “Sir, the misfortune is, that you will insensibly believe as much of it as you incline to believe”. —*The Life*. 1783, March 30th.

On April 18 (being Good Friday) I found him at breakfast, in his usual manner upon that day, drinking tea without milk, and eating a cross-bun to prevent faintness. We went to St. Clement’s church, as formerly. When we came home from church, he placed himself on one of the stone seats at his garden door, and I took the other, and thus in the open air, and in a placid frame of mind, he talked away very easily. JOHNSON: “Were I a country gentleman, I should not be very hospitable ; I should not have crowds in my house”. BOSWELL: “Sir Alexander Dick

tells me, that he remembers having a thousand people in a year to dine at his house; that is, reckoning each person as one, each time that he dined there". JOHNSON: "That, Sir, is about three a day". BOSWELL: "How your statement lessens the idea". JOHNSON: "That, Sir, is the good of counting. It brings everything to a certainty, which before floated in the mind indefinitely." BOSWELL: "But *Omne ignotum pro magnifico est*; one is sorry to have this diminished". JOHNSON: "Sir, you should not allow yourself to be delighted with error".
—*The Life*. 1783, April 18th.

Mr. Walker, the celebrated master of elocution, came in, and then we went upstairs into the study. WALKER: "Do you think, Sir, that there are any perfect synonyms in any language?" JOHNSON: "Originally there were not; but by using words negligently, or in poetry, one word comes to be confounded with another".
The Life. 1783, April 18th.

He censured a writer of entertaining travels for assuming a feigned character, saying (in his sense of the word), "he carries out one lie; we know not how many he brings back". At another time, talking of the same person, he observed, "Sir, your assent to a man whom you have never known to falsify, is a debt: but after you have known a man to falsify, your assent to him then is a favour." —*The Life*. 1784.

“That your book has been delayed I am glad, since you have gained an opportunity of being more exact. Of the caution necessary in adjusting narratives there is no end. Some tell what they do not know, that they may not seem ignorant, and others from mere indifference about truth. All truth is not, indeed, of equal importance ; but, if little violations are allowed, every violation will in time be thought little ; and a writer should keep himself vigilantly on his guard against the first temptations to negligence or supineness.”

—*The Life*. 1784, Nov. 1st.

AFFECTATION OF FEELING

When Johnson lived in Castle Street, Cavendish Square, he used frequently to visit two ladies who lived opposite to him, Miss Cotterells, daughters of Admiral Cotterell. Reynolds used also to visit there, and thus they met. Mr. Reynolds, as I have observed above, had, from the first reading of his “*Life of Savage*”, conceived a very high admiration of Johnson’s powers of writing. His conversation no less delighted him ; and he cultivated his acquaintance with the laudable zeal of one who was ambitious of general improvement. Sir Joshua, indeed, was lucky enough, at their very first meeting, to make a remark, which was so much above the commonplace style of conversation, that Johnson at once perceived that Reynolds had the habit of thinking for himself. The

ladies were regretting the death of a friend, to whom they owed great obligations ; upon which Reynolds observed, " You have, however, the comfort of being relieved from a burthen of gratitude." They were shocked a little at this alleviating suggestion, as too selfish ; but Johnson defended it in his clear and forcible manner, and was much pleased with the *mind*, the fair view of human nature, which it exhibited, like some of the reflections of Rochefoucault. The consequence was, that he went home with Reynolds, and supped with him.

—*The Life.* 1752.

" There are," said he, " inexcusable lies and consecrated lies. For instance we are told that on the arrival of the news of the unfortunate battle of Fontenoy, every heart beat, and every eye was in tears. Now we know that no man ate his dinner the worse, but there *should* have been all this concern : and to say there *was* (smiling), may be reckoned a consecrated lie."

—*The Life.* 1760.

" I will not trouble you with speculations about peace and war. The good or ill success of battles and embassies extends itself to a very small part of domestic life : we all have good and evil, which we feel more sensibly than our petty part of public miscarriage or prosperity. I am sorry for your disappointment, with which you seem more touched than I should expect a man of your resolution and experience to have been, did I not know that general

truths are seldom applied to particular occasions, and that the fallacy of our self-love extends itself as wide as our interest or affections. Every man believes that mistresses are unfaithful, and patrons capricious; but he excepts his own mistress and his own patron. We have all learned that greatness is negligent and contemptuous, and that in courts life is often lavished away in ungratified expectation; but he that approaches greatness, or glitters in a court, imagines that destiny has at last exempted him from the common lot."

—*The Life*. 1762, Dec. 21st.

On Wednesday, July 6, he was engaged to sup with me at my lodgings in Downing Street, Westminster. But on the preceding night my landlord having behaved very rudely to me and some company who were with me, I had resolved not to remain another night in his house. I was exceedingly uneasy at the awkward appearance I supposed I should make to Johnson and the other gentlemen whom I had invited, not being able to receive them at home, and being obliged to order supper at the Mitre. I went to Johnson in the morning, and talked of it as of a serious distress. He laughed, and said, "Consider, Sir, how insignificant this will appear a twelvemonth hence." Were this consideration to be applied to most of the little vexatious incidents of life, by which our quiet is too often disturbed, it would prevent many painful sensations. I have tried it frequently with good effect. "There is nothing," con-

tinued he, "in this mighty misfortune; nay, we shall be better at the Mitre."

—*The Life.* 1763, July 6th.

On Wednesday, July 20, Dr. Johnson, Mr. Dempster, and my uncle, Dr. Boswell, who happened to be now in London, supped with me at these chambers. JOHNSON: "Pity is not natural to man. Children are always cruel. Savages are always cruel. Pity is acquired and improved by the cultivation of reason. We may have uneasy sensations from seeing a creature in distress, without pity: for we have not pity unless we wish to relieve them. When I am on my way to dine with a friend, and finding it late, have bid the coachman make haste, if I happen to attend when he whips his horses, I may feel unpleasantly that the animals are put to pain, but I do not wish him to desist. No, Sir, I wish him to drive on."

—*The Life.* 1763, July 20th.

Next day we got to Harwich, to dinner; and my passage in the packet-boat to Helvoetsluys being secured, and my baggage put on board, we dined at our inn by ourselves. I happened to say it would be terrible if he should not find a speedy opportunity of returning to London, and be confined in so dull a place. JOHNSON: "Don't, Sir, accustom yourself to use big words for little matters. It would *not* be *terrible*, though I *were* to be detained some time here." The practice of using words of disproportionate magnitude, is, no doubt, too frequent every-

where: but, I think, most remarkable among the French, of which all who have travelled in France must have been struck with innumerable instances. —*The Life.* 1763, Aug. 6th.

Talking of our feeling for the distress of others — JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, there is much noise made about it, but it is greatly exaggerated. No, Sir, we have a certain degree of feeling to prompt us to do good; more than that, providence does not intend. It would be misery to no purpose." BOSWELL: "But suppose now, Sir, that one of your intimate friends were apprehended for an offence for which he might be hanged". JOHNSON: "I should do what I could to bail him, and give him any other assistance; but if he were once fairly hanged, I should not suffer". BOSWELL: "Would you eat your dinner that day, Sir?" JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, and eat it as if he were eating with me. Why, there's Barette, who is to be tried for his life to-morrow; friends have risen up for him on every side; yet if he should be hanged, none of them will eat a slice of plum pudding the less. Sir, that sympathetic feeling goes a very little way in depressing the mind."

I told him that I had dined lately at Foote's, who showed me a letter which he had received from Tom Davies, telling him that he had not been able to sleep from the concern he felt on account of "*this sad affair of Barette*", begging of him to try if he could suggest anything that might be of service; and, at the same time,

recommending to him an industrious young man who kept a pickle shop. JOHNSON: "Ay, Sir, here you have a specimen of human sympathy: a friend hanged, and a cucumber pickled. We know not whether Baretti or the pickle-man has kept Davies from sleep: nor does he know himself. And as to his not sleeping, Sir, Tom Davies is a very great man; Tom has been upon the stage, and knows how to do those things: I have not been upon the stage, and cannot do those things." BOSWELL: "I have often blamed myself, Sir, for not feeling for others as sensibly as many say they do". JOHNSON: "Sir, don't be duped by them any more. You will find these very feeling people are not very ready to do you good. They *pay* you by *feeling*." —*The Life*. 1769, Oct. 19th.

Talking of trade, he observed, "It is a mistaken notion that a vast deal of money is brought into a nation by trade. It is not so. Commodities come from commodities; but trade produces no capital accession of wealth. However, though there should be little profit in money, there is a considerable profit in pleasure, as it gives to one nation the productions of another; as we have wines and fruits, and many other foreign articles brought to us." BOSWELL: "Yes, Sir, and there is a profit in pleasure, by its furnishing occupation to such numbers of mankind". JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, you cannot call that pleasure to which all are averse, and which none begin but with the hope of leaving off; a thing which men dislike before they

have tried it, and when they have tried it". BOSWELL: "But, Sir, the mind must be employed, and we grow weary when idle". JOHNSON: "That is, Sir, because others being busy, we want company; but if we were all idle, there would be no growing weary; we should all entertain one another. There is, indeed, this in trade:—it gives men an opportunity of improving their situation. If there were no trade, many who are poor would always remain poor. But no man loves labour for itself." BOSWELL: "Yes, Sir, I know a person who does. He is a very laborious judge, and he loves the labour." JOHNSON: "Sir, that is because he loves respect and distinction. Could he have them without labour, he would like it less." BOSWELL: "He tells me he likes it for itself".—"Why, Sir, he fancies so, because he is not accustomed to abstract."

—*The Life*. 1769, Oct. 26th.

On Monday, March 25, we breakfasted at Mrs. Lucy Porter's. Johnson had sent an express to Dr. Taylor's, acquainting him of our being at Lichfield, and Taylor had returned an answer that his post-chaise should come for us this day. While we sat at breakfast, Dr. Johnson received a letter by the post, which seemed to agitate him very much. When he read it, he exclaimed, "One of the most dreadful things that has happened in my time." The phrase *my time*, like the word *age*, is usually understood to refer to an event of a public or general nature. I imagined something like an assassination of

the King—like a gunpowder plot carried into execution—or like another fire of London. When asked, “What is it, Sir?” he answered, “Mr. Thrale has lost his only son!” This was, no doubt, a very great affliction to Mr. and Mrs. Thrale, which their friends would consider accordingly; but from the manner in which the intelligence of it was communicated by Johnson, it appeared for the moment to be comparatively small. I, however, soon felt a sincere concern, and was curious to observe how Dr. Johnson would be affected. He said, “‘This is a total extinction to their family, as much as if they were sold into captivity.” Upon my mentioning that Mr. Thrale had daughters, who might inherit his wealth, “Daughters,” said Johnson, warmly, “he’ll no more value his daughters than—” I was going to speak. “Sir,” said he, “don’t you know how you yourself think? Sir, he wishes to propagate his name.” In short, I saw male succession strong in his mind, even where there was no name, no family of any long standing. I said, it was lucky he was not present when this misfortune happened. JOHNSON: “It is lucky for *me*. People in distress never think that you feel enough.” BOSWELL: “And, Sir, they will have the hope of seeing you, which will be a relief in the meantime; and when you get to them, the pain will be so far abated, that they will be capable of being consoled by you, which, in the first violence of it, I believe would not be the case”. JOHNSON: “No, Sir; violent pain of mind, like violent pain of body, *must* be severely felt”. BOSWELL: “I own, Sir, I have

not so much feeling for the distress of others as some people have, or pretend to have; but I know this, that I would do all in my power to relieve them". JOHNSON: "Sir, it is affectation to pretend to feel the distress of others as much as they do themselves. It is equally so, as if one should pretend to feel as much pain while a friend's leg is cutting off, as he does. No, Sir; you have expressed the rational and just nature of sympathy. I would have gone to the extremity of the earth to have preserved this boy."

—*The Life*. 1776, March 25th.

In the evening we went to the Town Hall, which was converted into a temporary theatre, and saw *Theodosius*, with *The Stratford Jubilee*. I was happy to see Dr. Johnson sitting in a conspicuous part of the pit, and receiving affectionate homage from all his acquaintance. We were quite gay and merry. I afterwards mentioned to him that I condemned myself for being so when poor Mr. and Mrs. Thrale were in such distress. JOHNSON: "You are wrong, Sir; twenty years hence Mr. and Mrs. Thrale will not suffer much pain from the death of their son. Now, Sir, you are to consider that distance of place, as well as distance of time, operates upon the human feelings. I would not have you be gay in the presence of the distressed, because it would shock them; but you may be gay at a distance. Pain for the loss of a friend, or of a relation whom we love, is occasioned by the want which we feel. In time the vacuity is

filled with something else; or sometimes the vacuity closes up of itself."

—*The Life*. 1776, March 26th.

The subject of grief for the loss of relations and friends being introduced, I observed that it was strange to consider how soon it in general wears away. Dr. Taylor mentioned a gentleman of the neighbourhood as the only instance he had ever known of a person who had endeavoured to *retain* grief. He told Dr. Taylor that after his lady's death, which affected him deeply, he resolved that the grief, which he cherished with a kind of sacred fondness, should be lasting; but that he found he could not keep it long. JOHNSON: "All grief for what cannot in the course of nature be helped soon wears away; in some sooner indeed, in some later; but it never continues very long, unless where there is madness, such as will make a man have pride so fixed in his mind, as to imagine himself a king; or any other passion in an unreasonable way: for all unnecessary grief is unwise, and, therefore, will not long be retained by a sound mind. If, indeed, the cause of our grief is occasioned by our own misconduct, if grief is mingled with remorse of conscience, it should be lasting." BOSWELL: "But, Sir, we do not approve of a man who very soon forgets the loss of a wife or a friend". JOHNSON: "Sir, we disapprove of him, not because he soon forgets his grief; for the sooner it is forgotten the better, but because we suppose, that if he forgets his wife or his

friend soon, he has not had much affection for them".

—*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 14th.

A gentleman was making an affected rant, as many people do, of great feelings about "his dear son", who was at school near London; how anxious he was lest he might be ill, and what he would give to see him. "Can't you," said Fitzherbert, "take a postchaise and go to him?" This, to be sure, *finished* the affected man, but there was not much in it.

—*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 15th.

Dr. Johnson told us at tea, that when some of Dr. Dodd's pious friends were trying to console him by saying that he was going to leave "a wretched world", he had honesty enough not to join in the cant: "No, no," said he, "it has been a very agreeable world to me." Johnson added, "I respect Dodd for thus speaking the truth; for, to be sure, he had for several years enjoyed a life of great voluptuousness."

—*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 19th.

Wishing to be satisfied what degree of truth there was in a story which a friend of Johnson's and mine had told me to his disadvantage, I mentioned it to him in direct terms; and it was to this effect: that a gentleman who had lived in great intimacy with him, shown him much kindness, and even relieved him from a spunging-house, having afterwards fallen into bad circumstances, was one day, when Johnson was at dinner with him, seized for debt, and

carried to prison; that Johnson sat still, undisturbed, and went on eating and drinking; upon which the gentleman's sister, who was present, could not suppress her indignation: "What, Sir," said she, "are you so unfeeling as not even to offer to go to my brother in his distress; you who have been so much obliged to him?" And that Johnson answered, "Madam, I owe him no obligation; what he did for me, he would have done for a dog."

Johnson assured me, that the story was absolutely false; but like a man conscious of being in the right, and desirous of completely vindicating himself from such a charge, he did not arrogantly rest on a mere denial, and on his general character, but proceeded thus:—"Sir, I was very intimate with that gentleman, and was once relieved by him from an arrest; but I never was present when he was arrested, never knew that he was arrested, and I believe he never was in difficulties after the time when he relieved me. I loved him much; yet, in talking of his general character, I may have said, though I do not remember that I ever did say so, that as his generosity proceeded from no principle, but was a part of his profusion, he would do for a dog, what he would do for a friend; but I never applied this remark to any particular instance, and certainly not to his kindness to me. If a profuse man, who does not value his money, and gives a large sum to a whore, gives half as much, or an equally large sum, to relieve a friend, it cannot be esteemed as virtue. This was all that I could say of that gentleman; and,

if said at all, it must have been said after his death. Sir, I would have gone to the world's end to relieve him. The remark about the dog, if made by me, was such a sally as might escape one when painting a man highly."

—*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 22nd.

He had an abhorrence of affectation. Talking of old Mr. Langton, of whom he said, "Sir, you will seldom see such a gentleman, such are his stores of literature, such his knowledge in divinity, and such his exemplary life;" he added, "and, Sir, he has no grimace, no gesticulation, no bursts of admiration on trivial occasions; he never embraces you with an overacted cordiality."

—*The Life*. 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's *Johnsoniana*.

"Depend upon it," said he, "that if a man *talks* of his misfortunes, there is something in them that is not disagreeable to him; for where there is nothing but pure misery, there never is any recourse to the mention of it."

—*The Life*. 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's *Johnsoniana*.

Mrs. Burney wondered that some very beautiful new buildings should be erected in Moorfields, in so shocking a situation as between Bedlam and St. Luke's Hospital; and said she could not live there. JOHNSON: "Nay, Madam, you see nothing there to hurt you. You no more think of madness by having windows that look to Bedlam, than you think of death by

having windows that look to a churchyard.”
MRS. BURNEY: “We may look to a churchyard, Sir; for it is right that we should be kept in mind of death”. JOHNSON: “Nay, Madam, if you go to that, it is right that we should be kept in mind of madness, which is occasioned by too much indulgence of imagination. I think a very moral use may be made of these new buildings; I would have those who have heated imaginations live there, and take warning.”
MRS. BURNEY: “But, Sir, many of the poor people that are mad, have become so from disease, or from distressing events. It is, therefore, not their fault, but their misfortune, and therefore to think of them is a melancholy consideration.” —*The Life*. 1783, April 18th.

“It has been said there is pleasure in writing, particularly in writing verses. I allow you may have pleasure from writing, after it is over, if you have written well; but you don’t go willingly to it again. I know, when I have been writing verses, I have run my finger down the margin, to see how many I had made, and how few I had to make.”

—*The Life*. 1783, May 1st.

I have no minute of any interview with Johnson till Thursday, May 15th, when I find what follows:—BOSWELL: “I wish much to be in Parliament, Sir”. JOHNSON: “Why, Sir, unless you come resolved to support any administration, you would be the worse for being in Parliament, because you would be obliged to live more ex-

pensively". BOSWELL: "Perhaps, Sir, I should be the less happy for being in Parliament. I never would sell my vote, and I should be vexed if things went wrong." JOHNSON: "That's cant, Sir. It would not vex you more in the house than in the gallery: public affairs vex no man." BOSWELL: "Have not they vexed yourself a little, Sir? Have not you been vexed by all the turbulence of this reign, and by that absurd vote of the House of Commons, 'That the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished'?" JOHNSON: "Sir, I have never slept an hour less, nor eat an ounce less meat. I would have knocked the factious dogs on the head, to be sure; but I was not *vexed*." BOSWELL: "I declare, Sir, upon my honour, I did imagine I was vexed, and took a pride in it; but it *was*, perhaps, cant; for I own I neither eat less, nor slept less". JOHNSON: "My dear friend, clear your *mind* of cant. You may *talk* as other people do; you may say to a man, 'Sir, I am your most humble servant.' You are *not* his most humble servant. You may say, 'These are bad times; it is a melancholy thing to be reserved to such times.' You don't mind the times. You tell a man, 'I am sorry you had such bad weather the last day of your journey, and were so much wet.' You don't care sixpence whether he is wet or dry. You may *talk* in this manner; it is a mode of talking in society: but don't *think* foolishly."

—*The Life*. 1783, May 16th.

I mentioned Jeremy Taylor's using, in his

forms of prayer, "I am the chief of sinners", and other such self-condemning expressions. "Now," said I, "this cannot be said with truth by every man, and therefore is improper for a general printed form. I myself cannot say that I am the worst of men; I *will* not say so." JOHNSON: "A man may know, that physically, that is, in the real state of things, he is not the worst man; but that morally he may be so. Law observes, that 'every man knows something worse of himself, than he is sure of in others'. You may not have committed such crimes as some men have done, but you do not know against what degree of light they have sinned. Besides, Sir, 'the chief of sinners' is a mode of expression for 'I am a great sinner'. So St. Paul, speaking of our SAVIOUR's having died to save sinners, says, 'of whom I am the chief': yet he certainly did not think himself so bad as Judas Iscariot." BOSWELL: "But, Sir, Taylor means it literally, for he founds a conceit upon it. When praying for the conversion of sinners, and of himself in particular, he says, 'Lord, thou wilt not leave thy *chief* work undone'." JOHNSON: "I do not approve of figurative expressions in addressing the Supreme Being; and I never use them. Taylor gives a very good advice: 'Never lie in your prayers: never confess more than you really believe; never promise more than you mean to perform'." I recollected this precept in his *Golden Grove*; but his *example* for prayer contradicts his *precept*.

—*The Life*. 1784, June 11th.

THE QUESTION OF CASUISTRY

IN CASES OF INTERROGATION

He now relieved the drudgery of his Dictionary and the melancholy of his grief by taking an active part in the composition of *The Adventurer*, in which he began to write, April 10, marking his essays with the signature T., by which most of his papers in that collection are distinguished: those, however, which have that signature, and also that of *Mysargyrus*, were not written by him, but, as I suppose, by Dr. Bathurst.

Johnson's saying, "I have no part in the paper, beyond now and then a motto," may seem inconsistent with his being the author of the papers marked T. But he had at this time written only one number; and, besides, even at any after period he might have used the same expression, considering it as a point of honour not to own them; for Mrs. Williams told me that, "as he had *given* those essays to Dr. Bathurst, who sold them at two guineas each, he never would own them; nay, he used to say he did not *write* them; but the fact was, that he *dictated* them while Bathurst wrote". I read to him Mrs. Williams's account: he smiled, and said nothing.

I am not quite satisfied with the casuistry by which the productions of one person are thus passed upon the world for the productions of another. I allow that not only knowledge,

but powers and qualities of mind may be communicated, but the actual effect of individual exertion never can be transferred, with truth, to any other than its own original cause. One person's child may be made the child of another person by adoption, as among the Romans, or by the ancient Jewish mode of a wife having children born to her upon her knees, by her handmaid. But these were children in a different sense from that of nature. It was clearly understood that they were not of the blood of their nominal parents. So in literary children, an author may give the profits and fame of his composition to another man, but cannot make that other the real author.

—*The Life.* 1753, March.

Mr. Levett this day showed me Dr. Johnson's library, which was contained in two garrets over his chambers, where Lintot, son of the celebrated bookseller of that name, had formerly his warehouse. I found a number of good books, but very dusty and in great confusion. The floor was strewed with manuscript leaves, in Johnson's own handwriting, which I beheld with a degree of veneration, supposing they perhaps might contain portions of the *Rambler* or of *Rasselas*. I observed an apparatus for chemical experiments, of which Johnson was all his life very fond. The place seemed to be very favourable for retirement and meditation. Johnson told me that he went up thither without mentioning it to his servant when he wanted to study, secure from

interruption; for he would not allow his servant to say he was not at home when he really was. "A servant's strict regard for truth," said he, "must be weakened by such a practice. A philosopher may know that it is merely a form of denial: but few servants are such nice distinguishers. If I accustom a servant to tell a lie for *me*, have I not reason to apprehend that he will tell many lies for *himself*?" I am, however, satisfied that every servant, of any degree of intelligence, understands saying his master is not at home, not at all as the affirmation of a fact, but as customary words, intimating that his master wishes not to be seen; so that there can be no bad effect from it.

—*The Life*. 1763, July 18th.

We got up between seven and eight, and found Mr. Boyd in the dining-room, with tea and coffee before him, to give us breakfast. We were in an admirable humour. Lady Errol had given each of us a copy of an ode by Beattie, on the birth of her son, Lord Hay. Mr. Boyd asked Dr. Johnson how he liked it. Dr. Johnson, who did not admire it, got off very well, by taking it out, and reading the second and third stanzas of it with much melody. This, without his saying a word, pleased Mr. Boyd. He observed, however, to Dr. Johnson, that the expression as to the family of Errol,

"A thousand years have seen it shine"

compared with what went before, was an anti-climax, and that it would have been better

“Ages have seen”, &c.

Dr. Johnson said, “So great a number as a thousand is better. *Dolus latet in universalibus*. Ages might be only two ages.”

—*The Tour*. 1773, Aug. 25th.

I stated to him this case:—“Suppose a man has a daughter, who he knows has been seduced, but her misfortune is concealed from the world; should he keep her in his house? Would he not, by doing so, be accessory to imposition? And, perhaps, a worthy, unsuspecting man might come and marry this woman, unless the father inform him of the truth.” JOHNSON: “Sir, he is accessory to no imposition. His daughter is in his house; and if a man courts her, he takes his chance. If a friend, or, indeed, if any man, asks his opinion whether he should marry her, he ought to advise him against it, without telling why, because his real opinion is then required. Or, if he has other daughters who know of her frailty, he ought not to keep her in his house. You are to consider the state of life is this: we are to judge of one another’s characters as well as we can; and a man is not bound in honesty or honour to tell us the faults of his daughter or of himself. A man who has debauched his friend’s daughter is not obliged to say to everybody—‘Take care of me; don’t let me enter your house without suspicion.

I once debauched a friend's daughter; I may debauch yours.'"

—*The Life*. 1776, April 5th.

Friday, September 19, after breakfast, Dr. Johnson and I set out in Dr. Taylor's chaise to go to Derby. The day was fine, and we resolved to go by Keddlestone, the seat of Lord Scarsdale, that I might see his Lordship's fine house. I was struck with the magnificence of the building; and the extensive park, with the finest verdure, covered with deer, and cattle, and sheep, delighted me.

Our names were sent up, and a well-dressed elderly housekeeper, a most distinct articulator, showed us the house; which I need not describe, as there is an account of it published in Adams' *Works in Architecture*. Dr. Johnson thought better of it to-day than when he saw it before; for he had lately attacked it violently, saying, "It would do excellently for a town hall. The large room with the pillars," said he, "would do for the judges to sit in at the assizes; the circular room for a jury-chamber; and the room above for prisoners." Still he thought the large room ill-lighted, and of no use but for dancing in; and the bed-chambers but indifferent rooms; and that the immense sum which it cost was injudiciously laid out. Dr. Taylor had put him in mind of his *appearing* pleased with the house. "But," said he, "that was when Lord Scarsdale was present. Politeness obliges us to appear pleased with a man's works when he is present. No man

will be so ill-bred as to question you. You may therefore pay compliments without saying what is not true. I should say to Lord Scarsdale of his large room, 'My Lord, this is the most *costly* room that I ever saw;' which is true."

—*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 19th.

Johnson disapproved of Dr. Dodd's leaving the world persuaded that *The Convent's Address to his unhappy Brethren* was of his own writing. "But, Sir," said I, "you contributed to the deception; for when Mr. Seward expressed a doubt to you that it was not Dodd's own, because it had a great deal more force of mind in it than anything known to be his, you answered, 'Why should you think so? Depend upon it, Sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.'" JOHNSON: "Sir, as Dodd got it from me to pass as his own, while that could do him any good, that was an *implied promise* that I should not own it. To own it, therefore, would have been telling a lie, with the addition of breach of promise, which was worse than simply telling a lie to make it be believed it was Dodd's. Besides, Sir, I did not *directly* tell a lie; I left the matter uncertain. Perhaps I thought that Seward would not believe it the less to be mine for what I said; but I would not put it in his power to say I had owned it."

—*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 19th.

GARRICK: "Of all the translations that ever were attempted, I think Elphinston's *Martial*

the most extraordinary. He consulted me upon it, who am a little of an epigrammatist myself, you know. I told him freely, 'You don't seem to have that turn.' I asked him if he was serious; and finding he was, I advised him against publishing. Why, his translation is more difficult to understand than the original. I thought him a man of some talents; but he seems crazy in this." JOHNSON: "Sir, you have done what I had not courage to do. But he did not ask my advice, and I did not force it upon him to make him angry with me." GARRICK: "But as a friend, Sir—" JOHNSON: "Why, such a friend as I am with him—no." GARRICK: "But if you see a friend going to tumble over a precipice?" JOHNSON: "That is an extravagant case, Sir. You are sure a friend will thank you for hindering him from tumbling over a precipice; but, in the other case, I should hurt his vanity, and do him no good. He would not take my advice. His brother-in-law, Strahan, sent him a subscription of £50, and said he would send him £50 more, if he would not publish."

—*The Life*. 1778, April 9th.

We talked of a lady's verses on Ireland. MISS REYNOLDS: "Have you seen them, Sir?" JOHNSON: "No, Madam; I have seen a translation from Horace, by one of her daughters. She showed it me." MISS REYNOLDS: "And how was it, Sir?" JOHNSON: "Why, very well for a young Miss's verses; that is to say, compared with excellence, nothing; but very well

for the person who wrote them. I am vexed at being shown verses in that manner." Miss REYNOLDS: "But if they should be good, why not give them hearty praise?" JOHNSON: "Why, Madam, because I have not then got the better of my bad humour from having been shown them. You must consider, Madam, beforehand they may be bad, as well as good. Nobody has a right to put another under such a difficulty that he must either hurt the person by telling the truth, or hurt himself by telling what is not true." BOSWELL: "A man often shows his writings to people of eminence, to obtain from them, either from their good-nature, or from their not being able to tell the truth firmly, a commendation, of which he may afterwards avail himself". JOHNSON: "Very true, Sir. Therefore the man who is asked by an author what he thinks of his work is put to the torture, and is not obliged to speak the truth; so that what he says is not considered as his opinion; yet he has said it, and cannot retract it; and this author, when mankind are hunting him with a canister at his tail, can say, 'I would not have published had not Johnson, or Reynolds, or Musgrave, or some other good judge, commended the work.' Yet I consider it as a very difficult question in conscience, whether one should advise a man not to publish a work, if profit be his object; for the man may say, 'Had it not been for you, I should have had the money.' Now you cannot be sure; for you have only your opinion, and the public may think very differently." SIR JOSHUA REY-

NOLDS: "You must, upon such an occasion have two judgments; one as to the real value of the work, the other as to what may please the general taste of the time". JOHNSON: "But you can be *sure* of neither; and therefore I should scruple much to give a suppressive vote".

—*The Life*. 1778, April 25th.

I arrived on Monday, March 15; and next morning, at a late hour, found Dr. Johnson sitting over his tea, attended by Mrs. Desmoulin, Mr. Levett, and a clergyman, who had come to submit some poetical pieces to his revision. It is wonderful what a number and variety of writers, some of them even unknown to him, prevailed on his good-nature to look over their works, and suggest corrections and improvements. My arrival interrupted for a little while the important business of this true representative of Bayes. Upon its being resumed, I found that the subject under immediate consideration was a translation yet in manuscript, of the *Carmen Seculare* of Horace, which had this year been set to music, and performed as a public entertainment in London, for the joint benefit of Monsieur Philidor and Signor Baretti. When Johnson had done reading, the author asked him bluntly, "If, upon the whole, it was a good translation?" Johnson, whose regard for truth was uncommonly strict, seemed to be puzzled for a moment what answer to make; as he certainly could not honestly commend the performance, with exquisite address he evaded the question, thus, "Sir, I do not

say that it may not be made a very good translation." Here nothing whatever in favour of the performance was affirmed, and yet the writer was not shocked. A printed *Ode to the Warlike Genius of Britain* came next in review. The bard was a lank bony figure, with short black hair; he was writhing himself in agitation while Johnson read, and showing his teeth in a grin of earnestness, exclaimed in broken sentence, and in a keen, sharp tone, "Is that poetry, Sir? Is it Pindar?" JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, there is a great deal of what is called poetry". Then turning to me, the poet cried, "My muse has not been long upon the town, and (pointing to the Ode) it trembles under the hand of a great critic." Johnson in a tone of displeasure asked him, "Why do you praise Anson?" I did not trouble him by asking his reason for this question. He proceeded, "Here is an error, Sir; you have made Genius feminine."—"Palpable, Sir," cried the enthusiast; "I know it. But (in a lower tone) it was to pay a compliment to the Duchess of Devonshire, with which her Grace was pleased. She is walking across Coxheath, in the military uniform, and I suppose her to be the Genius of Britain." JOHNSON: "Sir, you are giving a reason for it; but that will not make it right. You may have a reason why two and two should make five; but they will still make but four."

—*The Life*. 1779, March 15th.

Talking of the wonderful concealment of the author of the celebrated letters signed *Junius*,

he said, "I should have believed Burke to be Junius, because I know no man but Burke who is capable of writing these letters; but Burke spontaneously denied it to me. The case would have been different, had I asked him if he was the author; a man so questioned, as to an anonymous publication, may think he has a right to deny it."

—*The Life*. 1779, March 26th

"Richard Baxter believes that a suicide may be saved. 'If', says he, 'it should be objected that what I maintain may encourage suicide, I answer, I am not to tell a lie to prevent it.'"

—*The Life*. 1783, May 29th.

We talked of the casuistical question, whether it was allowable at any time to depart from *Truth*? JOHNSON: "The general rule is, that truth should never be violated, because it is of the utmost importance to the comfort of life, that we should have a full security by mutual faith; and occasional inconveniences should be willingly suffered, that we may preserve it. There must, however, be some exceptions. If, for instance, a murderer should ask you which way a man is gone, you may tell him what is not true, because you are under a previous obligation not to betray a man to a murderer." BOSWELL: "Supposing the person who wrote *Junius* were asked whether he was the author, might he deny it?" JOHNSON: "I don't know what to say to this. If you were *sure* that he

wrote *Junius*, would you, if he denied it, think as well of him afterwards? Yet it may be urged, that what a man has no right to ask, you may refuse to communicate; and there is no other effectual mode of preserving a secret and an important secret, the discovery of which may be very hurtful to you, but a flat denial; for if you are silent, or hesitate, or evade, it will be held equivalent to a confession. But stay, Sir, here is another case. Supposing the author had told me confidentially that he had written *Junius*, and I were asked if he had, I should hold myself at liberty to deny it, as being under a previous promise, express or implied, to conceal it. Now what I ought to do for the author, may I not do for myself? But I deny the lawfulness of telling a lie to a sick man, for fear of alarming him. You have no business with consequences; you are to tell the truth. Besides, you are not sure what effect your telling him that he is in danger may have. It may bring his distemper to a crisis, and that may cure him. Of all lying, I have the greatest abhorrence of this, because I believe it has been frequently practised on myself."

—*The Life*. 1784, June 13th.

IN CASES OF ADVOCACY

I asked him whether, as a moralist, he did not think that the practice of the law, in some degree, hurt the nice feeling of honesty. JOHN-SON: "Why no, Sir, if you act properly. You

are not to deceive your clients with false representations of your opinion ; you are not to tell lies to a judge." BOSWELL : " But what do you think of supporting a cause which you know to be bad ? " JOHNSON : " Sir, you do not know it to be good or bad till the judge determines it. I have said that you are to state facts fairly ; so that your thinking, or what you call knowing, a cause to be bad, must be from reasoning, must be from your supposing your arguments to be weak and inconclusive. But, Sir, that is not enough. An argument which does not convince yourself may convince the judge to whom you urge it ; and if it does convince him, why, then, Sir, you are wrong, and he is right. It is his business to judge ; and you are not to be confident in your own opinion that a cause is bad, but to say all you can for your client, and then hear the judge's opinion." BOSWELL : " But, Sir, does not affecting a warmth when you have no warmth, and appearing to be clearly of one opinion when you are in reality of another opinion, does not such dissimulation impair one's honesty ? Is there not some danger that a lawyer may put on the same mask in common life in the intercourse with his friends ? " JOHNSON : " Why no, Sir. Everybody knows you are paid for affecting warmth for your client ; and it is, therefore, properly no dissimulation : the moment you come from the bar you resume your usual behaviour. Sir, a man will no more carry the artifice of the bar into the common intercourse of society, than a man who is paid for tumbling upon his hands

will continue to tumble upon his hands when he should walk on his feet."

—*The Life*. 1768, Spring.

In Archbishop Laud's Diary, I found the following passage, which I read to Dr. Johnson:—

"1623, February 1, Sunday. I stood by the most illustrious Prince Charles, at dinner. He was then very merry, and talked occasionally of many things with his attendants. Among other things, he said, that if he were necessitated to take any particular profession of life, he could not be a lawyer, adding his reason: 'I cannot,' said he, 'defend a bad, nor yield in a good cause.'" JOHNSON: "Sir, this is false reasoning; because every cause has a bad side: and a lawyer is not overcome, though the cause which he has endeavoured to support be determined against him".

—*The Life*. 1773, April 9th.

Goldsmith having said that Garrick's compliment to the Queen, which he introduced into the play of *The Chances*, which he had altered and revised this year, was mean and gross flattery. JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, I would not *write*, I would not give solemnly under my hand, a character beyond what I thought really true; but a speech on the stage, let it flatter ever so extravagantly, is formular. It has always been formular to flatter kings and queens; so much so, that even in our church-service we have 'our most religious king', used indiscri-

minately, whoever is king. Nay, they even flatter themselves—‘we have been graciously pleased to grant’. No modern flattery, however, is so gross as that of the Augustan age, where the emperor was deified. ‘*Præsens Deus habebitur Augustus.*’ And as to meanness (rising into warmth), how is it mean in a player—a showman—a fellow who exhibits himself for a shilling, to flatter his queen? The attempt, indeed, was dangerous; for if it had missed, what became of Garrick, and what became of the queen? As Sir William Temple says of a great general, it is necessary not only that his designs be formed in a masterly manner, but that they should be attended with success. Sir, it is right, at a time when the royal family is not generally liked, to let it be seen that the people like at least one of them.”

—*The Life.* 1773, April 29th.

We talked of the practice of the law. Sir William Forbes said, he thought an honest lawyer should never undertake a cause which he was satisfied was not a just one. “Sir,” said Mr. Johnson, “a lawyer has no business with the justice or injustice of the cause which he undertakes, unless his client asks his opinion, and then he is bound to give it honestly. The justice or injustice of the cause is to be decided by the judge. Consider, Sir; what is the purpose of courts of justice? It is, that every man may have his cause fairly tried, by men appointed to try causes. A lawyer is not to tell what he knows to be a lie: he is not to produce what

he knows to be a false deed ; but he is not to usurp the province of the jury and of the judge, and determine what shall be the effect of evidence, what shall be the result of legal argument. As it rarely happens that a man is fit to plead his own cause, lawyers are a class of the community, who, by study and experience, have acquired the art and power of arranging evidence, and of applying to the points at issue what the law has settled. A lawyer is to do for his client all that his client might fairly do for himself, if he could. If, by a superiority of attention, of knowledge, of skill, and a better method of communication, he has the advantage of his adversary, it is an advantage to which he is entitled. There must always be some advantage, on one side or other ; and it is better that advantage should be had by talents, than by chance. If lawyers were to undertake no causes till they were sure they were just, a man might be precluded altogether from a trial of his claim, though, were it judicially examined, it might be found a very just claim.”—This was sound practical doctrine, and rationally repressed a too refined scrupulosity of conscience.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 15th.

There were some books on the board which served as a chimney-piece. Dr. Johnson took up Burnet's *History of his Own Times*. He said, “The first part of it is one of the most entertaining books in the English language ; it is quite dramatic : while he went about everywhere, saw everywhere, and heard everywhere.

By the first part, I mean so far as it appears that Burnet himself was actually engaged in what he has told; and this may be easily distinguished." Captain M'Lean censured Burnet for his high praise of Lauderdale in a dedication, when he shows him in his history to have been so bad a man. JOHNSON: "I do not myself think that a man should say in a dedication what he could not say in a history. However, allowance should be made; for there is a great difference. The known style of a dedication is flattery: it professes to flatter. There is the same difference between what a man says in a dedication, and what he says in a history, as between a lawyer's pleading a cause, and reporting it." —*The Tour*. 1773, Oct. 4th.

"The writer of an epitaph should not be considered as saying nothing but what is strictly true. Allowance must be made for some degree of exaggerated praise. In lapidary inscriptions a man is not upon oath."

—*The Life*. 1775. Dr. Burney's *Collection*.

I have preserved no more of his conversation at the times when I saw him during the rest of this month, till Sunday, the 30th of May, when I met him in the evening at Mr. Hoole's, where there was a large company of ladies and gentlemen. Sir James Johnstone happened to say, that he paid no regard to the arguments of counsel at the bar of the House of Commons, because they were paid for speaking. JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir, argument is argument. You

cannot help paying regard to their arguments, if they are good. If it were testimony, you might disregard it, if you knew that it were purchased. There is a beautiful image in Bacon upon this subject: testimony is like an arrow shot from a long bow; the force of it depends on the strength of the hand that draws it. Argument is like an arrow from a cross-bow, which has equal force though shot by a child."

—*The Life*. 1784, May 30th.

VARIOUS DEPARTURES FROM VERACITY

LITERARY FORGERIES. (1) MACPHERSON AND OSSIAN

At this time the controversy concerning the pieces published by Mr. James Macpherson, as translations of Ossian, was at its height. Johnson had all along denied their authenticity; and, what was still more provoking to their admirers, maintained that they had no merit. The subject having been introduced by Dr. Fordyce, Dr. Blair, relying on the internal evidence of their antiquity, asked Dr. Johnson whether he thought any man of a modern age could have written such poems? Johnson replied, "Yes, Sir, many men, many women, and many children." Johnson, at this time, did not know that Dr. Blair had just published a Dissertation, not only defending their authenticity, but seriously ranking them with the poems of Homer and Virgil; and when he

was afterwards informed of this circumstance, he expressed some displeasure at Dr. Fordyce's having suggested the topic, and said, "I am not sorry that they got thus much for their pains. Sir, it was like leading one to talk of a book, when the author is concealed behind the door." —*The Life*. 1763, May 24th.

The poem of Fingal, he said, was a mere unconnected rhapsody, a tiresome repetition of the same images. "In vain shall we look for the *lucidus ordo*, where there is neither end nor object, design or moral, *nec certa recurrit imago*." —*The Life*. 1770. Dr. Maxwell's *Collectanea*.

We spoke of Fingal. Dr. Johnson said calmly, "If the poems were really translated, they were certainly first written down. Let Mr. Macpherson deposit the manuscript in one of the colleges at Aberdeen, where there are people who can judge; and, if the professors certify the authenticity, then there will be an end of the controversy. If he does not take this obvious and easy method, he gives the best reason to doubt; considering too, how much is against it *à priori*."

—*The Tour*. 1773, Aug. 23rd.

Dr. Johnson asked him as to Fingal. He said he could repeat some passages in the original, that he heard his grandfather had a copy of it; but that he could not affirm that Ossian composed all that poem as it is now published. This came pretty much to what

Dr. Johnson had maintained; though he goes farther, and contends that it is no better than such an epic poem as he could make from the song of Robin Hood; that is to say, that, except a few passages, there is nothing truly ancient but the names and some vague traditions. Mr. M'Queen alleged that Homer was made up of detached fragments. Dr. Johnson denied this; observing, that it had been one work originally, and that you could not put a book of the *Iliad* out of its place; and he believed the same might be said of the *Odyssey*. —*The Tour*. 1773, Sept. 8th.

His notion as to the poems published by Mr. Macpherson, as the works of Ossian, was not shaken here. Mr. M'Queen always evaded the point of authenticity, saying only that Mr. Macpherson's pieces fell far short of those he knew in Erse, which were said to be Ossian's. JOHNSON: "I hope they do. I am not disputing that you may have poetry of great merit; but that Macpherson's is not a translation from ancient poetry. You do not believe it. I say before you, you do not believe it, though you are very willing that the world should believe it." Mr. M'Queen made no answer to this. Dr. Johnson proceeded. I look upon Macpherson's *Fingal* to be as gross an imposition as ever the world was troubled with. Had it been really an ancient work, a true specimen how men thought at that time, it would have been a curiosity of the first rate. As a modern production, it is nothing. He said, he could never get

the meaning of an Erse song explained to him. They told him, the chorus was generally unmeaning. "I take it," said he, "Erse songs are like a song which I remember : it was composed in Queen Elizabeth's time, on the Earl of Essex ; and the burthen was :

'Radaratoo, radarate, radara tadara tandore'".

"But surely," said Mr. M'Queen, "there were words to it, which had meaning." JOHNSON : "Why, yes, Sir ; I recollect a stanza, and you shall have it :

'O! then bespoke the prentices all,
Living in London, both proper and tall,
For Essex's sake they would fight all.
Radaratoo, radarate, radara tadara tandore.'"

When Mr. M'Queen began again to expatiate on the beauty of Ossian's poetry, Dr. Johnson entered into no further controversy, but, with a pleasant smile, only cried, "Ay, ay ; *Radaratoo, radarate.*"

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 22nd.

I took Fingal down to the parlour in the morning, and tried a test proposed by Mr. Roderick M'Leod, son to Ulinish. Mr. M'Queen had said he had some of the poem in the original. I desired him to mention any passage in the printed book, of which he could repeat the original. He pointed out one in page 50 of the quarto edition, and read the Erse, while Mr. Roderick M'Leod and I looked

on the English; and Mr. M'Leod said, that it was pretty like what Mr. M'Queen had recited. But when Mr. M'Queen read a description of Cuchullin's sword in Erse, together with a translation of it in English verse, by Sir James Foulis, Mr. M'Leod said, that was much more like than Mr. Macpherson's translation of the former passage. Mr. M'Queen then repeated in Erse a description of one of the horses in Cuchullin's car. Mr. M'Leod said, Mr. Macpherson's English was nothing like it.

When Dr. Johnson came down, I told him that I had now obtained some evidence concerning Fingal; for that Mr. M'Queen had repeated a passage in the original Erse, which Mr. Macpherson's translation was pretty like; and reminded him that he himself had once said, he did not require Mr. Macpherson's *Ossian* to be more like the original than Pope's *Homer*. JOHNSON: "Well, Sir, this is just what I always maintained. He has found names, and stories, and phrases, nay passages in old songs, and with them has blended his own compositions, and so made what he gives to the world as the translation of an ancient poem." If this was the case, I observed, it was wrong to publish it as a poem in six books. JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir; and to ascribe it to a time too when the Highlanders knew nothing of *books*, and nothing of *six*;—or perhaps were got the length of counting six. We have been told, by Condamine, of a nation that could count no more than four. This should be

told to Monboddo; it would help him. There is as much charity in helping a man downhill, as in helping him uphill." BOSWELL: "I don't think there is as much charity". JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, if his *tendency* be downwards. Till he is at the bottom, he flounders; get him once there, and he is quiet. Swift tells, that Stella had a trick, which she learned from Addison, of encouraging a man in absurdity, instead of endeavouring to extricate him."

Mr. M^cQueen's answers to the enquiries concerning *Ossian* were so unsatisfactory, that I could not help observing that, were he examined in a court of justice, he would find himself under a necessity of being more explicit. JOHNSON: "Sir, he has told Blair a little too much, which is published; and he sticks to it. He is so much at the head of things here, that he has never been accustomed to be closely examined; and so he goes on quite smoothly." BOSWELL: "He has never had anybody to work him". JOHNSON: "No, Sir; and a man is seldom disposed to work himself; though he ought to work himself, to be sure". Mr. M^cQueen made no reply.

—*The Tour*. 1773, Sept. 23rd.

Fingal being talked of, Dr. Johnson, who used to boast that he had, from the first, resisted both *Ossian* and the Giants of Patagonia, averred his positive disbelief of its authenticity. Lord Elibank said, "I am sure it is not Macpherson's. Mr. Johnson, I keep company a great deal with you; it is known I do. I may

borrow from you better things than I can say myself, and give them as my own; but, if I should, everybody will know whose they are." The Doctor was not softened by this compliment. He denied merit to *Fingal*, supposing it to be the production of a man who has had the advantages that the present age affords; and said, "Nothing is more easy than to write enough in that style if once you begin." One gentleman in company expressing his opinion "that *Fingal* was certainly genuine, for that he had heard a great part of it repeated in the original", Dr. Johnson indignantly asked him, whether he understood the original; to which an answer being given in the negative, "Why then," said Dr. Johnson, "we see to what *this* testimony comes:—thus it is."

I mentioned this as a remarkable proof how liable the mind of man is to credulity, when not guarded by such strict examination as that which Dr. Johnson habitually practised. The talents and integrity of the gentleman who made the remark are unquestionable; yet, had not Dr. Johnson made him advert to the consideration, that he who does not understand a language, cannot know that something which is recited to him is in that language, he might have believed, and reported to this hour, that he had "heard a great part of *Fingal* repeated in the original".

For the satisfaction of those on the north of the Tweed, who may think Dr. Johnson's account of Caledonian credulity and inaccuracy too strong, it is but fair to add, that he ad-

mitted the same kind of ready belief might be found in his own country. "He would undertake," he said, "to write an epic poem on the story of 'Robin Hood', and half England, to whom the names and places he should mention in it are familiar, would believe and declare they had heard it from their earliest years."

One of his objections to the authenticity of *Fingal*, during the conversation at Ulinish, is omitted in my *Journal*, but I perfectly recollect it. "Why is not the original deposited in some public library, instead of exhibiting attestations of its existence? Suppose there were a question in a court of justice, whether a man be dead or alive: You aver he is alive, and you bring fifty witnesses to swear it: I answer, 'Why do you not produce the man?'" This is an argument founded on one of the first principles of the *law of evidence*, which Gilbert would have held to be irrefragable.

I do not think it incumbent on me to give any precise decided opinion upon this question, as to which I believe more than some, and less than others. The subject appears to have now become very uninteresting to the public. That *Fingal* is not from beginning to end a translation from the Gaelic, but that *some* passages have been supplied by the editor to connect the whole, I have heard admitted by very warm advocates for its authenticity. If this be the case, why are not these distinctly ascertained? Antiquaries, and admirers of the work, may complain, that they are in a situation similar to that of the unhappy gentleman whose wife in-

formed him, on her death-bed, that one of their reputed children was not his; and, when he eagerly begged her to declare which of them it was, she answered, "*That* you shall never know"; and expired, leaving him in irremediable doubt as to them all.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Nov. 10th.

"I am surprised that, knowing, as you do, the disposition of your countrymen to tell lies in favour of each other, you can be at all affected by any reports that circulate among them. Macpherson never in his life offered me a sight of any original, or of any evidence of any kind;—but thought only of intimidating me by noise and threats, till my last answer,—that I would not be deterred from detecting what I thought a cheat, by the menaces of a ruffian,—put an end to our correspondence.

"The state of the question is this. He and Dr. Blair, whom I consider as deceived, say that he copied the poem from old manuscripts. His copies, if he had them, and I believe him to have none, are nothing. Where are the manuscripts? They can be shown if they exist, but they were never shown. '*De non existentibus et non apparentibus*', says our law, '*eadem est ratio.*' No man has a claim to credit upon his own word, when better evidence, if he had it, may be easily produced. But so far as we can find, the Erse language was never written till very lately for the purposes of religion. A nation that cannot write, or a language that never was written, has no manuscripts.

“But whatever he has he never offered to show. If old manuscripts should now be mentioned, I should, unless there were more evidence than can be easily had, suppose them another proof of Scotch conspiracy in national falsehood.

“Do not censure the expression; you know it to be true.”

What words were used by Mr. Macpherson in his letter to the venerable sage, I have never heard; but they are generally said to have been of a nature very different from the language of literary contest. Dr. Johnson's answer appeared in the newspapers of the day, and has since been frequently republished; but not with perfect accuracy. I give it as dictated to me by himself, written down in his presence, and authenticated by a note in his own handwriting, “*This, I think, is a true copy*”.

“MR. JAMES MACPHERSON,

“I received your foolish and impudent letter. Any violence offered me I shall do my best to repel; and what I cannot do for myself, the law shall do for me. I hope I shall never be deterred from detecting what I think a cheat, by the menaces of a ruffian.

“What would you have me retract? I thought your book an imposture; I think it an imposture still. For this opinion I have given my reasons to the public, which I here dare you to refute. Your rage I defy. Your abilities, since your

Homer, are not so formidable; and what I hear of your morals inclines me to pay regard not to what you shall say, but to what you shall prove. You may print this if you will.

“SAM. JOHNSON.”

—*The Li/e.* 1775, Feb. 7th.

That he [Johnson] was to some degree of excess a *true-born Englishman*, so as to have entertained an undue prejudice against both the country and the people of Scotland, must be allowed. But it was a prejudice of the head, and not of the heart. He had no ill-will to the Scotch; for, if he had been conscious of that, he would never have thrown himself into the bosom of their country, and trusted to the protection of its remote inhabitants with a fearless confidence. His remark upon the nakedness of the country, from its being denuded of trees, was made after having travelled two hundred miles along the Eastern coast, where certainly trees are not to be found near the road; and he said it was “a map of the road” which he gave. His disbelief of the authenticity of the poems ascribed to Ossian, a Highland bard, was confirmed in the course of his journey, by a very strict examination of the evidence offered for it; and although their authenticity was made too much a national point by the Scotch, there were many respectable persons in that country who did not concur in this; so that his judgment upon the question ought not to be decried, even by

those who differ from him. As to myself, I can only say, upon a subject now become very uninteresting, that when the fragments of Highland poetry first came out, I was much pleased with their wild peculiarity, and was one of those who subscribed to enable their editor, Mr. Macpherson, then a young man, to make a search in the Highlands and Hebrides for a long poem in the Erse language, which was reported to be preserved somewhere in those regions. But when there came forth an Epic Poem in six books, with all the common circumstances of former compositions of that nature; and when, upon an attentive examination of it, there was found a perpetual recurrence of the same images which appear in the fragments; and when no ancient manuscript, to authenticate the work, was deposited in any public library, though that was insisted on as a reasonable proof, *who* could forbear to doubt?

—*The Life.* 1775.

“You then are going wild about Ossian. Why do you think any part can be proved? The dusky manuscript of Egg is probably not fifty years old; if it be an hundred it proves nothing. The tale of Clanranald is no proof. Has Clanranald told it? Can he prove it? There are, I believe, no Erse manuscripts. None of the old families had a single letter in Erse that we heard of. You say it is likely that they could write. The learned, if any learned there were, could; but knowing, by that learning, some written language, in that

language they wrote, as letters had never been applied to their own. If there are manuscripts, let them be shown, with some proof that they are not forged for the occasion. You say many can remember parts of Ossian. I believe all those parts are versions of the English; at least there is no proof of their antiquity.

“Macpherson is said to have made some translations himself; and having taught a boy to write it, ordered him to say that he had learned it of his grandmother. The boy, when he grew up, told the story. This Mrs. Williams heard at Mr. Strahan’s table. Don’t be credulous; you know how little a Highlander can be trusted. Macpherson is, so far as I know, very quiet. Is not that proof enough? Everything is against him. No visible manuscript: no inscription in the language: no correspondence among friends: no transaction of business, of which a single scrap remains in the ancient families. Macpherson’s pretence is, that the character was Saxon. If he had not talked unskilfully of *manuscripts*, he might have fought with oral tradition much longer. As to Mr. Grant’s information, I suppose he knows much less of the matter than ourselves.”

—*The Life.* 1775, Feb. 25th.

On Tuesday, March 21, I arrived in London; and on repairing to Dr. Johnson’s, before dinner, found him in his study, sitting with Mr. Peter Garrick, the elder brother of David, strongly resembling him in countenance and voice, but of more sedate and placid manners. Johnson

informed me, that though Mr. Beauclerk was in great pain, it was hoped he was not in danger, and that he now wished to consult Dr. Heberden, to try the effect of a "*new understanding*". Both at this interview, and in the evening at Mr. Thrale's, where he and Mr. Peter Garrick and I met again, he was vehement on the subject of the Ossian controversy; observing, "We do not know that there are any ancient Erse manuscripts: and we have no other reason to disbelieve that there are men with three heads, but that we do not know that there are any such men." He also was outrageous upon his supposition that my countrymen "loved Scotland better than truth", saying, "All of them—nay, not all, but *droves* of them—would come up, and attest any thing for the honour of Scotland." He also persevered in his wild allegation, that he questioned if there was a tree between Edinburgh and the English border older than himself. I assured him he was mistaken, and suggested that the proper punishment would be, that he should receive a stripe at every tree above a hundred years old, that was found within that space. He laughed, and said, "I believe I might submit to it for a *banbee*!" —*The Life*. 1775, March 21st.

Ossian being mentioned—JOHNSON: "Supposing the Irish and Erse languages to be the same, which I do not believe, yet as there is no reason to suppose that the inhabitants of the Highlands and Hebrides ever wrote their native language, it is not to be credited that a long

poem was preserved among them. If we had no evidence of the art of writing being practised in one of the counties of England, we should not believe that a long poem was preserved *there*, though in the neighbouring counties, where the same language was spoken, the inhabitants could write." BEAUCLERK: "The ballad of Lilliburlero was once in the mouths of all the people of this country, and is said to have had a great effect in bringing about the Revolution. Yet I question whether anybody can repeat it now; which shows how improbable it is that much poetry should be preserved by tradition."

One of the company suggested an internal objection to the antiquity of the poetry said to be Ossian's, that we do not find the wolf in it, which must have been the case had it been of that age. —*The Life*. 1775, April 7th.

Sir Joshua Reynolds communicated to me the following particulars:—

Johnson thought the poems, published as translations from Ossian, had so little merit, that he said, "Sir, a man might write such stuff for ever, if he would *abandon* his mind to it." —*The Life*. 1783.

I shall here mention what, in strict chronological arrangement, should have appeared in my account of last year; but may more properly be introduced here, the controversy having not been closed till this. The Rev. Mr. Shaw, a native of one of the Hebrides, having entertained doubts of the authenticity of the poems ascribed

to Ossian, divested himself of national bigotry ; and having travelled in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, and also in Ireland, in order to furnish himself with materials for a Gaelic Dictionary, which he afterwards compiled, was so fully satisfied that Dr. Johnson was in the right upon the question, that he candidly published a pamphlet, stating his conviction, and the proofs and reasons on which it was founded. A person at Edinburgh, of the name of Clark, answered this pamphlet with much zeal, and much abuse of its author. Johnson took Mr. Shaw under his protection, and gave him his assistance in writing a reply, which has been admired by the best judges, and by many been considered as conclusive. A few paragraphs, which sufficiently mark their great author, shall be selected.

“ My assertions are, for the most part, purely negative: I deny the existence of *Fingal*, because in a long and curious peregrination through the Gaelic regions I have never been able to find it. What I could not see myself I suspect to be equally invisible to others ; and I suspect with the more reason, as among all those who have seen it no man can show it.

“ Mr. Clark compares the obstinacy of those who disbelieve the genuineness of *Ossian* to a blind man, who should dispute the reality of colours, and deny that the British troops are clothed in red. The blind man’s doubt would be rational, if he did not know by experience that others have a power which he himself wants : but what perspicacity has Mr. Clark

which Nature has withheld from me or the rest of mankind?

“The true state of the parallel must be this. Suppose a man, with eyes like his neighbours, was told by a boasting corporal, that the troops, indeed, wore red clothes for their ordinary dress, but that every soldier had likewise a suit of black velvet, which he put on when the King reviews them. This he thinks strange, and desires to see the fine clothes, but finds nobody in forty thousand men that can produce either coat or waistcoat. One, indeed, has left them in his chest at Port Mahon; another has always heard that he ought to have velvet clothes somewhere; and a third has heard somebody say, that soldiers ought to wear velvet. Can the enquirer be blamed if he goes away believing that a soldier’s red coat is all that he has?

“But the most obdurate incredulity may be shamed or silenced by facts. To overpower contradictions, let the soldier show his velvet coat, and the Fingalist the original of *Ossian*.

“The difference between us and the blind man is this:—the blind man is unconvinced, because he cannot see; and we, because, though we can see, we find that nothing can be shown.”

—*The Lifè*. 1783.

LITERARY FORGERIES. (2) CHATTERTON AND ROWLEY

On Monday, April 29th, he and I made an excursion to Bristol, where I was entertained with seeing him enquire upon the spot into the

authenticity of "*Rowley's* poetry", as I had seen him enquire upon the spot into the authenticity of "*Ossian's* poetry". George Catcot, the pewterer, who was as zealous for Rowley as Hugh Blair was for *Ossian* (I trust my reverend friend will excuse the comparison), attended us at our inn, and with a triumphant air of lively simplicity, called out, "I'll make Dr. Johnson a convert." Dr. Johnson, at his desire, read aloud some of Chatterton's fabricated verses, while Catcot stood at the back of his chair, moving himself like a pendulum, and beating time with his feet, and now and then looking into Dr. Johnson's face, wondering that he was not yet convinced. We called on Mr. Barret, the surgeon, and saw some of the *originals*, as they were called, which were executed very artificially; but from a careful inspection of them, and a consideration of the circumstances with which they were attended, we were quite satisfied of the imposture, which, indeed, has been clearly demonstrated, from internal evidence, by several able critics.

Honest Catcot seemed to pay no attention whatever to any objections, but insisted, as an end of all controversy, that we should go with him to the tower of the church of St. Mary Redcliff, and *view with our own eyes* the ancient chest in which the manuscripts were found. To this, Dr. Johnson good-naturedly agreed; and though troubled with a shortness of breathing, laboured up a long flight of steps till we came to the place where the wondrous chest stood. "*There,*" said Catcot, with a bouncing confident

credulity, "*there* is the very chest itself." After this *ocular demonstration*, there was no more to be said. He brought to my recollection a Scotch Highlander, a man of learning too, and who had seen the world, attesting, and at the same time giving his reasons for the authenticity of *Fingal*:—"I have heard all that poem when I was young."—"Have you, Sir? Pray what have you heard?"—"I have heard Ossian, Oscar, and *every one of them*."

Johnson said of Chatterton, "This is the most extraordinary young man that has encountered my knowledge. It is wonderful how the whelp has written such things."

—*The Life*. 1776, April 29th.

I think this wild adherence to Chatterton more unaccountable than the obstinate defence of Ossian. In Ossian there is a national pride, which may be forgiven, though it cannot be applauded. In Chatterton there is nothing but the resolution to say again what has once been said. —*The Life*. 1782, March 2nd.

LITERARY FORGERIES. (3) THE DUKE OF BERWICK'S "MEMOIRS"

JOHNSON: "Oh! Mr. Dilly—you must know that an English Benedictine monk at Paris has translated *The Duke of Berwick's Memoirs*, from the original French, and has sent them to me to sell. I offered them to Strahan, who sent them back with this answer:—'That the

first book he had published was the *Duke of Berwick's Life*, by which he had lost: and he hated the name.'—Now I honestly tell you that Strahan has refused them; but I also honestly tell you, that he did it upon no principle, for he never looked into them." DILLY: "Are they well translated, Sir?" JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, very well—in a style very current and very clear. I have written to the Benedictine to give me an answer upon two points:—What evidence is there that the letters are authentic? (for if they are not authentic they are nothing);—And how long will it be before the original French is published? For if the French edition is not to appear for a considerable time, the translation will be almost as valuable as an original book. They will make two volumes in octavo; and I have undertaken to correct every sheet as it comes from the press." Mr. Dilly desired to see them, and said he would send for them. He asked Dr. Johnson if he would write a preface for them. JOHNSON: "No, Sir. The Benedictines were very kind to me, and I'll do what I undertook to do; but I will not mingle my name with them. I am to gain nothing by them. I'll turn them loose upon the world, and let them take their chance." DR. MAYO: "Pray, Sir, are Ganganelli's letters authentic?" JOHNSON: "No, Sir. Voltaire put the same question to the editor of them that I did to Macpherson—Where are the originals?"

—*The Life*. 1778, April 15th.

BIOGRAPHICAL GLOSSES

And he [Johnson] will be seen as he really was; for I profess to write, not his panegyric, which must be all praise, but his Life; which, great and good as he was, must not be supposed to be entirely perfect. To be as he was, is indeed subject of panegyric enough to any man in this state of being; but in every picture there should be shade as well as light, and when I delineate him without reserve, I do what he himself recommended, both by his precept and his example.

“If the biographer writes from personal knowledge, and makes haste to gratify the public curiosity, there is danger lest his interest, his fear, his gratitude, or his tenderness, overpower his fidelity, and tempt him to conceal, if not to invent. There are many who think it an act of piety to hide the faults or failings of their friends, even when they can no longer suffer by their detection; we therefore see whole ranks of characters adorned with uniform panegyric, and not to be known from one another but by extrinsic and casual circumstances. ‘Let me remember,’ says Hale, ‘when I find myself inclined to pity a criminal, that there is likewise a pity due to the country.’ If we owe regard to the memory of the dead, there is yet more respect to be paid to knowledge, to virtue, and to truth.” —*The Life*. Introduction.

“The business of the biographer is often to pass slightly over those performances and inci-

dents which produce vulgar greatness, to lead the thoughts into domestic privacies, and display the minute details of daily life, where exterior appendages are cast aside, and men excel each other only by prudence and by virtue. The account of Thuanus is with great propriety said by its author to have been written, that it might lay open to posterity the private and familiar character of that man, *cujus ingenium et candorem ex ipsius scriptis sunt olim semper miraturi*, — whose candour and genius will to the end of time be by his writings preserved in admiration.

“There are many invisible circumstances, which, whether we read as enquirers after natural or moral knowledge, whether we intend to enlarge our science or increase our virtue, are more important than public occurrences. Thus Salust, the great master of nature, has not forgot in his account of Catiline, to remark, that *his walk was now quick, and again slow*, as an indication of a mind revolving something with violent commotion. Thus the story of Melanchthon affords a striking lecture on the value of time, by informing us, that when he had made an appointment, he expected not only the hour but the minute to be fixed, that the day might not run out in the idleness of suspense; and all the plans and enterprises of De Witt are now of less importance to the world than that part of his personal character, which represents him as *careful of his health, and negligent of his life*.

“But biography has often been allotted to

writers, who seem very little acquainted with the nature of their task, or very negligent about the performance. They rarely afford any other account than might be collected from public papers, but imagine themselves writing a life, when they exhibit a chronological series of actions or preferments; and have so little regard to the manners or behaviour of their heroes, that more knowledge may be gained of a man's real character, by a short conversation with one of his servants, than from a formal and studied narrative, begun with his pedigree, and ended with his funeral.

“There are, indeed, some natural reasons why these narratives are often written by such as were not likely to give much instruction or delight, and why most accounts of particular persons are barren and useless. If a life be delayed till interest and envy are at an end, we may hope for impartiality, but must expect little intelligence; for the incidents which give excellence to biography are of a volatile and evanescent kind, such as soon escape the memory, and are rarely transmitted by tradition. We know how few can portray a living acquaintance, except by his most prominent and observable particularities, and the grosser features of his mind; and it may be easily imagined how much of this little knowledge may be lost in imparting it, and how soon a succession of copies will lose all resemblance of the original.”

—*The Life*. Introduction (quotation from *The Rambler*. No. 60).

He said, "Goldsmith's *Life of Parnell* is poor; not that it is poorly written, but that he had poor materials; for nobody can write the life of a man, but those who have eat and drunk and lived in social intercourse with him."

—*The Life*. 1772, March 31st.

We had a very cheerful evening, and Dr. Johnson talked a good deal on the subject of literature. Speaking of the noble family of Boyle, he said, that all the Lord Orrerys, till the present, had been writers. 'The first wrote several plays; the second was Bentley's antagonist; the third wrote the *Life of Swift*, and several other things; his son Hamilton wrote some papers in the *Adventurer* and *World*. He told us, he was well acquainted with Swift's Lord Orrery. He said, he was a feeble-minded man; that, on the publication of Dr. Delany's *Remarks* on his book, he was so much alarmed that he was afraid to read them. Dr. Johnson comforted him, by telling him they were both in the right; that Delany had seen most of the good side of Swift, Lord Orrery most of the bad. M'Leod asked, if it was not wrong in Orrery to expose the defects of a man with whom he lived in intimacy. JOHNSON: "Why, no, Sir, after the man is dead; for then it is done historically". He added, "If Lord Orrery had been rich, he would have been a very liberal patron. His conversation was like his writings, neat and elegant, but without strength. He grasped at more than his abilities could reach; tried to pass for a better talker, a better writer,

and a better thinker than he was. There was a quarrel between him and his father, in which his father was to blame; because it arose from the son's not allowing his wife to keep company with his father's mistress. The old lord showed his resentment in his will,—leaving his library from his son, and assigning, as his reason, that he could not make use of it."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 22nd.

Talking of biography, he said he did not think that the life of any literary man in England had been well written. Beside the common incidents of life, it should tell us his studies, his mode of living, the means by which he attained to excellence, and his opinion of his own works. He told us, he had sent Derrick to Dryden's relations, to gather materials for his life; and he believed Derrick had got all that he himself should have got; but it was nothing. He added he had a kindness for Derrick, and was sorry he was dead.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 22nd.

Dr. Johnson did not talk much to-day, but seemed intent in listening to the schemes of future excursion, planned by Col. Dr. Birch, however, being mentioned, he said, he had more anecdotes than any man. I said, Percy had a great many; that he flowed with them like one of the brooks here. JOHNSON: "If Percy is like one of the brooks here, Birch was like the river Thames. Birch excelled Percy in that, as much as Percy excels Goldsmith." I mentioned Lord

Hailes as a man of anecdote. He was not pleased with him, for publishing only such memorials and letters as were unfavourable for the Stuart family. "If," said he, "a man fairly warns you, 'I am to give all the ill; do you find the good;' he may: but if the object which he professes be to give a view of a reign, let him tell all the truth. I would tell truth of the two Georges, or of that scoundrel, King William.—Granger's *Biographical History* is full of curious anecdote, but might have been better done. The dog is a Whig. I do not like much to see a Whig in any dress; but I hate to see a Whig in a parson's gown."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 24th.

We drank tea with Dr. Horne, late President of Magdalen College, and Bishop of Norwich, of whose abilities, in different respects, the public has had eminent proofs, and the esteem annexed to whose character was increased by knowing him personally. He had talked of publishing an edition of Walton's *Lives*, but had laid aside that design, upon Dr. Johnson's telling him, from mistake, that Lord Hailes intended to do it. I had wished to negotiate between Lord Hailes and him, that one or other should perform so good a work. JOHNSON: "In order to do it well, it would be necessary to collect all the editions of Walton's *Lives*. By way of adapting the book to the taste of the present age, they have, in a late edition, left out a vision which he relates Dr. Donne had, but it should be restored; and there should be a

critical catalogue given of the works of the different persons whose lives were written by Walton, and therefore their works must be carefully read by the editor."

We then went to Trinity College, where he introduced me to Mr. Thomas Warton, with whom we passed a part of the evening. We talked of biography. JOHNSON: "It is rarely well executed. They only, who live with a man, can write his life with any genuine exactness and discrimination; and few people who have lived with a man know what to remark about him. The chaplain of a late bishop, whom I was to assist in writing some memoirs of his lordship, could tell me scarcely anything."

I said Mr. Robert Dodsley's life should be written, as he had been so much connected with the wits of his time, and by his literary merit had raised himself from the station of a footman. Mr. Warton said, he had published a little volume under the title of *The Muse in Livery*. JOHNSON: "I doubt whether Dodsley's brother would thank a man who should write his life; yet Dodsley himself was not unwilling that his original low condition should be recollected. When Lord Lyttelton's *Dialogues of the Dead* came out, one of which is between Apicius, an ancient epicure, and Dartineuf, a modern epicure, Dodsley said to me, 'I knew Dartineuf well, for I was once his footman.'"

—*The Life*. 1776, March 20th.

I mentioned Mr. Maclaurin's uneasiness on account of a degree of ridicule carelessly thrown

on his deceased father, in Goldsmith's *History of Animated Nature*, in which that celebrated mathematician is represented as being subject to fits of yawning so violent as to render him incapable of proceeding in his lecture ; a story altogether unfounded, but for the publication of which the law would give no reparation. This led us to agitate the question, whether legal redress could be obtained, even when a man's deceased relation was calumniated in a publication. Mr. Murray maintained there should be reparation, unless the author could justify himself by proving the fact. JOHNSON : " Sir, it is of so much more consequence that truth should be told, than that individuals should not be made uneasy, that it is much better that the law does not restrain writing freely concerning the characters of the dead. Damages will be given to a man who is calumniated in his lifetime, because he may be hurt in his worldly interest, or at least hurt in his mind ; but the law does not regard that uneasiness which a man feels on having his ancestor calumniated. That is too nice. Let him deny what is said, and let the matter have a fair chance by discussion. But if a man could say nothing against a character but what he can prove, history could not be written ; for a great deal is known of men of which proof cannot be brought. A minister may be notoriously known to take bribes, and yet you may not be able to prove it." Mr. Murray suggested that the author should be obliged to show some sort of evidence, though he would not require a strict

legal proof; but Johnson firmly and resolutely opposed any restraint whatever, as adverse to a free investigation of the characters of mankind.

—*The Life*. 1776, April 3rd.

Talking of biography, I said, in writing a life, a man's peculiarities should be mentioned, because they mark his character. JOHNSON: "Sir, there is no doubt as to peculiarities: the question is, whether a man's vices should be mentioned; for instance, whether it should be mentioned that Addison and Parnell drank too freely; for people will probably more easily indulge in drinking from knowing this; so that more ill may be done by the example, than good by telling the whole truth". Here was an instance of his varying from himself in talk; for when Lord Hailes and he sat one morning calmly conversing in my house at Edinburgh, I well remember that Dr. Johnson maintained, that "if a man is to write *A Panegyric*, he may keep vices out of sight: but if he professes to write *A Life*, he must represent it really as it was": and when I objected to the danger of telling that Parnell drank to excess, he said, that "it would produce an instructive caution to avoid drinking, when it was seen that even the learning and genius of Parnell could be debased by it". And in the *Hebrides* he maintained, as appears from my *Journal*, that a man's intimate friend should mention his faults, if he writes his life.

—*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 17th.

Next day I found him at home in the morning. He praised Delany's *Observations on Swift*: said that his book and Lord Orrery's might both be true, though one viewed Swift more, and the other less favourably; and that, between both, we might have a complete notion of Swift. —*The Life*. 1778, April 8th.

LOGICAL FALLACIES

I mentioned Mallet's tragedy of *Elvira*, which had been acted the preceding winter at Drury Lane, and that the Honourable Andrew Erskine, Mr. Dempster, and myself, had joined in writing a pamphlet, entitled *Critical Strictures*, against it. That the mildness of Dempster's disposition had, however, relented; and he had candidly said, "We have hardly a right to abuse this tragedy; for, bad as it is, how vain should either of us be to write one not near so good!" JOHNSON: "Why, no, Sir; this is not just reasoning. You *may* abuse a tragedy, though you cannot write one. You may scold a carpenter who has made you a bad table, though you cannot make a table. It is not your trade to make tables."

—*The Life*. 1763, June 25th.

Talking of those who denied the truth of Christianity, he said, "It is always easy to be on the negative side. If a man were now to deny that there is salt upon the table, you could not reduce him to an absurdity. Come, let us try this a little further. I deny that Canada

is taken, and I can support my denial by pretty good arguments. The French are a much more numerous people than we; and it is not likely that they would allow us to take it. 'But the ministry have assured us, in all the formality of the Gazette, that it is taken.'—Very true. But the ministry have put us to an enormous expense by the war in America, and it is their interest to persuade us that we have got something for our money.—'But the fact is confirmed by thousands of men who were at the taking of it.'—Ay, but these men have still more interest in deceiving us. They don't want that you should think the French have beat them, but that they have beat the French. Now suppose you should go over and find that it really is taken, that would only satisfy yourself; for when you come home we will not believe you. We will say, you have been bribed. — Yet, Sir, notwithstanding all these plausible objections, we have no doubt that Canada is really ours. Such is the weight of common testimony. How much stronger are the evidences of the Christian religion?"
—*The Life.* 1763, July 14th.

One evening, when a young gentleman teased him with an account of the infidelity of his servant, who, he said, would not believe the Scriptures, because he could not read them in the original tongues, and be sure that they were not invented:—"Why, foolish fellow," said Johnson, "has he any better authority for almost everything that he believes?" Bos-

WELL: "Then the vulgar, Sir, never can know they are right, but must submit themselves to the learned". JOHNSON: "To be sure, Sir. The vulgar are the children of the State, and must be taught like children." BOSWELL: "Then, Sir, a poor Turk must be a Mohammetan, just as a poor Englishman must be a Christian?" JOHNSON: "Why, yes, Sir; and what then? This, now, is such stuff as I used to talk to my mother, when I first began to think myself a clever fellow; and she ought to have whipt me for it."

—*The Life*. 1766, February.

I spoke of Mr. Harris, of Salisbury, as being a very learned man, and in particular an eminent Grecian. JOHNSON: "I am not sure of that. His friends gave him out as such, but I know not who of his friends are able to judge of it." GOLDSMITH: "He is what is much better: he is a worthy humane man". JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir, that is not to the purpose of our argument; that will as much prove that he can play the fiddle as well as Giardini, as that he is an eminent Grecian". GOLDSMITH: "The greatest musical performers have but small emoluments. Giardini, I am told, does not get above seven hundred a year." JOHNSON: "That is indeed but little for a man to get, who does best that which so many endeavour to do. There is nothing, I think, in which the power of art is shown so much as in playing on the fiddle. In all other things we can do something at first. Any man will forge a bar of

iron if you give him a hammer; not so well as a smith, but tolerably. A man will saw a piece of wood, and make a box, though a clumsy one; but give him a fiddle and a fiddle-stick, and he can do nothing."

—*The Life*. 1773, April 29th.

On one of the evenings at my house, when he told that Lord Lovat boasted to an English nobleman, that though he had not his wealth, he had two thousand men whom he could at any time call into the field, the Honourable Alexander Gordon observed, that those two thousand men brought him to the block. "True, Sir," said Dr. Johnson: "but you may just as well argue concerning a man who has fallen over a precipice to which he has walked too near,—‘His two legs brought him to that,’ is he not the better for having two legs?"

—*The Tour*. 1773, November.

I visited him by appointment in the evening, and we drank tea with Mrs. Williams. He told me that he had been in the company of a gentleman, whose extraordinary travels had been much the subject of conversation. But I found he had not listened to him with that full confidence, without which there is little satisfaction in the society of travellers. I was curious to hear what opinion so able a judge as Johnson had formed of his abilities, and I asked if he was not a man of sense. JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, he is not a distinct relater; and I should say,

he is neither abounding nor deficient in sense. I did not perceive any superiority of understanding." BOSWELL: "But will you not allow him a nobleness of resolution, in penetrating into distant regions?" JOHNSON: "That, Sir, is not to the present purpose. We are talking of sense. A fighting cock has a nobleness of resolution." —*The Life*. 1775, April 1st.

I mentioned Dr. Adam Smith's book on *The Wealth of Nations*, which was just published, and that Sir John Pringle had observed to me, that Dr. Smith, who had never been in trade, could not be expected to write well on that subject any more than a lawyer upon physic. JOHNSON: "He is mistaken, Sir; a man who has never been engaged in trade himself may undoubtedly write well upon trade, and there is nothing which requires more to be illustrated by philosophy than trade does. As to mere wealth, that is to say, money, it is clear that one nation or one individual cannot increase its store but by making another poorer; but trade procures what is more valuable, the reciprocation of the peculiar advantages of different countries. A merchant seldom thinks but of his own particular trade. To write a good book upon it, a man must have extensive views. It is not necessary to have practised, to write well upon a subject." I mentioned law as a subject on which no man could write well without practice. JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, in England, where so much money is to be got by the practice of the law, most of our writers upon

it have been in practice; though Blackstone had not been much in practice when he published his *Commentaries*. But upon the Continent, the great writers on law have not all been in practice; Grotius, indeed, was; but Puffendorff was not, Burlamaqui was not."

—*The Life*. 1776, March 15th.

I told him that when I objected to keeping company with a notorious infidel, a *celebrated friend of ours* said to me, "I do not think that men who live laxly in the world, as you and I do, can with propriety assume such an authority; Dr. Johnson may, who is uniformly exemplary in his conduct. But it is not very consistent to shun an infidel to-day, and get drunk to-morrow." JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir, this is sad reasoning. Because a man cannot be right in all things, is he to be right in nothing? Because a man sometimes gets drunk, is he therefore to steal? This doctrine would very soon bring a man to the gallows."

—*The Life*. 1779, October.

"On occasion of Dr. Johnson's publishing his pamphlet of 'The False Alarm', there came out a very angry answer (by many supposed to be by Mr. Wilkes). Dr. Johnson determined on not answering it; but, in conversation with Mr. Langton, mentioned a particular or two, which, if he *had* replied to it, he might perhaps have inserted. In the answerer's pamphlet, it had been said with solemnity, 'Do you consider, Sir, that a House

of Commons is to the people as a creature is to its Creator?' 'To this question', said Dr. Johnson, 'I could have replied that, in the first place, the idea of a Creator must be such as that he has a power to unmake or annihilate his creature.'

"'Then it cannot be conceived that a creature can make laws for its Creator.'"

—*The Life*. 1788. Mr. Bennet Langton's
Johnsoniana.

LOGICAL FALLACIES—PRECEPT VERSUS PRACTICE

Dr. John Campbell, the celebrated political and biographical writer, being mentioned, Johnson said: "Campbell is a man of much knowledge, and has a good share of imagination. His *Hermippus Redivivus* is very entertaining, as an account of the Hermetic philosophy, and as furnishing a curious history of the extravagances of the human mind. If it were merely imaginary, it would be nothing at all. Campbell is not always rigidly careful of truth in his conversation: but I do not believe there is anything of this carelessness in his books. Campbell is a good man, a pious man. I am afraid he has not been in the inside of a church for many years; but he never passes a church without pulling off his hat. This shows that he has good principles. I used to go pretty often to Campbell's on a Sunday evening till I began to consider that the shoals of Scotch men who flocked about him might probably

say when anything of mine was well done,
‘Ay, ay, he has learnt this of CAWMELL!’”

—*The Life*. 1763, July 1st.

Of Dr. John Campbell, the author, he said,
“He is a very inquisitive and a very able man,
and a man of good religious principles, though
I am afraid he has been deficient in practice.
Campbell is radically right; and we may hope
that in time there will be good practice.”

—*The Life*. 1773, April 11th.

At supper, Lady MacLeod mentioned Dr. Cadogan’s book on the gout. JOHNSON: “It is a good book in general, but a foolish one in particulars. It is good in general, as recommending temperance and exercise, and cheerfulness. In that respect it is only Dr. Cheyne’s book told in a new way; and there should come out such a book every thirty years, dressed in the mode of the times. It is foolish, in maintaining that the gout is not hereditary, and that one fit of it, when gone, is like a fever when gone.”—Lady MacLeod objected that the author does not practice what he teaches. JOHNSON: “I cannot help that, Madam. That does not make his book the worse. People are influenced more by what a man says, if his practice is suitable to it,—because they are blockheads. The more intellectual people are, the readier will they attend to what a man tells them. If it is just, they will follow it, be his practice what it will. No man practises so well as he

writes. I have, all my life long, been lying till noon; yet I tell all young men, and tell them with great sincerity, that nobody who does not rise early will ever do any good. Only consider! You read a book; you are convinced by it; you do not know the author. Suppose you afterwards know him, and find that he does not practise what he teaches; are you to give up your former conviction? At this rate you would be kept in a state of equilibrium, when reading every book, till you knew how the author practised." "But," said Lady MacLeod, "you would think better of Dr. Cadogan, if he acted according to his principles." JOHNSON: "Why, Madam, to be sure, a man who acts in the face of light, is worse than a man who does not know so much; yet I think no man should be the worse thought of for publishing good principles. 'There is something noble in publishing truth, though it condemns one's self.'"

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 14th.

Mr. John M'Aulay passed the evening with us at our inn. When Dr. Johnson spoke of people whose principles were good, but whose practice was faulty, Mr. M'Aulay said, he had no notion of people being in earnest in their good professions, whose practice was not suitable to them. The Doctor grew warm, and said, "Sir, you are so grossly ignorant of human nature, as not to know that a man may be very sincere in good principles, without having good practice?"

Dr. Johnson was unquestionably in the right;

and whoever examines himself candidly, will be satisfied of it, though the inconsistency between principles and practice is greater in some men than in others.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Oct. 25th.

On Thursday, April 6, I dined with him at Mr. Thomas Davies's, with Mr. Hickey, the painter, and my old acquaintance, Mr. Moody, the player. JOHNSON: "It is certain that a man may be very immoral with exterior grace. Lovelace, in *Clarissa*, is a very genteel and a very wicked character. Tom Hervey, who died t'other day, though a vicious man, was one of the genteelest men that ever lived." Tom Davies instanced Charles the Second. JOHNSON (taking fire at any attack upon that Prince, for whom he had an extraordinary partiality): "Charles the Second was licentious in his practice; but he always had a reverence for what was good. Charles the Second knew his people, and rewarded merit. The Church was at no time better filled than in his reign. He was the best King we have had from his time till the reign of his present Majesty, except James the Second, who was a very good King, but unhappily believed that it was necessary for the salvation of his subjects that they should be Roman Catholics. *He* had the merit of endeavouring to do what he thought was for the salvation of the souls of his subjects, till he lost a great empire. *We*, who thought that we should *not* be saved if we were Roman Catholics, had the merit of maintaining our religion, at the

expense of submitting ourselves to the government of King William (for it could not be done otherwise), to the government of one of the most worthless scoundrels that ever existed. No; Charles the Second was not such a man as —— (naming another King). He did not destroy his father's will. He took money, indeed, from France: but he did not betray those over whom he ruled: he did not let the French fleet pass ours. George the First knew nothing, and desired to know nothing: did nothing, and desired to do nothing; and the only good thing that is told of him is, that he wished to restore the crown to its hereditary successor." He roared with prodigious violence against George the Second. When he ceased, Moody interjected, in an Irish tone, and with a comic look, "Ah! poor George the Second."

—*The Life*. 1775, April 6th.

OTHER DEVIATIONS, DUE TO EXAGGERATION, NON-VERIFICATION, LOOSE TALKING

An animated debate took place whether Martinelli should continue his *History of England* to the present day. GOLDSMITH: "To be sure he should". JOHNSON: "No, Sir; he would give great offence. He would have to tell of almost all the living great what they do not wish told." GOLDSMITH: "It may, perhaps, be necessary for a native to be more cautious; but a foreigner who comes among us without prejudice may be considered as holding the place of a judge, and

may speak his mind freely". JOHNSON: "Sir, a foreigner, when he sends a work from the press, ought to be on his guard against catching the error and mistaken enthusiasm of the people among whom he happens to be". GOLDSMITH: "Sir, he wants only to sell his history, and to tell truth; one an honest the other a laudable motive". JOHNSON: "Sir, they are both laudable motives. It is laudable in a man to wish to live by his labours; but he should write so as he may *live* by them, not so as he may be knocked on the head. I would advise him to be at Calais before he publishes his history of the present age. A foreigner who attaches himself to a political party in this country, is in the worst state that can be imagined: he is looked upon as a mere intermeddler. A native may do it from interest." BOSWELL: "Or principle". GOLDSMITH: "There are people who tell a hundred political lies every day, and are not hurt by it. Surely, then, one may tell truth with safety." JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, in the first place, he who tells a hundred lies has disarmed the force of his lies. But besides, a man had rather have a hundred lies told of him than one truth which he does not wish should be told." GOLDSMITH: "For my part, I'd tell truth, and shame the devil". JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir; but the devil will be angry. I wish to shame the devil as much as you do, but I should choose to be out of the reach of his claws." GOLDSMITH: "His claws can do you no harm, when you have the shield of truth".

—*The Life*. 1773, April 15th.

The custom of eating dogs at Otaheité being mentioned, Goldsmith observed that this was also a custom in China; that a dog-butcher is as common there as any other butcher; and that when he walks abroad all the dogs fall on him. JOHNSON: "That is not owing to his killing dogs, sir. I remember a butcher at Lichfield, whom a dog, that was in the house where I lived, always attacked. It is the smell of carnage which provokes this, let the animals he has killed be what they may." GOLDSMITH: "Yes, there is a general abhorrence in animals at the signs of massacre. If you put a tub full of blood into a stable, the horses are like to go mad". JOHNSON: "I doubt that". GOLDSMITH: "Nay, Sir, it is a fact well authenticated". THRALE: "You had better prove it before you put it into your book on natural history. You may do it in my stable if you will." JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir, I would not have him prove it. If he is content to take his information from others, he may get through his book with little trouble, and without much endangering his reputation. But if he makes experiments for so comprehensive a book as his, there would be no end to them; his erroneous assertions would then fall upon himself; and he might be blamed for not having made experiments as to every particular."

—*The Life*. 1773, April 29th.

Dr. Gerard told us that an eminent printer was very intimate with Warburton. JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, he has printed some of his works,

and perhaps bought the property of some of them. The intimacy is such as one of the Professors here may have with one of the carpenters who is repairing the college." "But," said Gerard, "I saw a letter from him to his printer, in which he says, that the one half of the clergy of the church of Scotland are fanatics, and the other half infidels." JOHNSON: "Warburton has accustomed himself to write letters just as he speaks, without thinking any more of what he throws out. When I read Warburton first, and observed his force, and his contempt of mankind, I thought he had driven the world before him; but I soon found that was not the case; for Warburton, by extending his abuse, rendered it ineffectual."

He told me, when we were by ourselves, that he thought it very wrong in the printer to show Warburton's letter, as it was raising a body of enemies against him. He thought it foolish in Warburton to write so to the printer; and added, "Sir, the worst way of being intimate, is by scribbling."

—*The Tour*. 1773, Aug. 23rd.

We reposed ourselves a little in Mr. Ferne's house. He had everything in neat order as in England; and a tolerable collection of books. I looked into Pennant's *Tour in Scotland*. He says little of this fort; but that "the barracks, &c., form several streets". This is aggrandising. Mr. Ferne observed, if he had said they form a square, with a row of buildings before it, he would have given a juster descrip-

tion. Dr. Johnson remarked, "how seldom descriptions correspond with realities; and the reason is, that people do not write them till some time after, and then their imagination has added circumstances".

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 28th.

He [Johnson] said, "he thought very highly of Bentley; that no man now went so far in the kinds of learning that he cultivated; that the many attacks on him were owing to envy, and to a desire of being known, by being in competition with such a man; that it was safe to attack him, because he never answered his opponents, but let them die away. It was attacking a man who would not beat them, because his beating them would make them live the longer. And he was right not to answer; for, in his hazardous method of writing, he could not but be often enough wrong; so it was better to leave things to their general appearance, than own himself to have erred in particulars." —*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 10th.

In the dispute about Anaitis, Mr. M'Queen said, Asia Minor was peopled by Scythians, and, as they were the ancestors of the Celts, the same religion might be in Asia Minor and Sky. JOHNSON: "Alas! Sir, what can a nation that has not letters tell of its original? I have always difficulty to be patient when I hear authors gravely quoted, as giving accounts of savage nations, which accounts they had from the savages themselves. What can the M'Craas

— tell about themselves a thousand years ago? There is no tracing the connection of ancient nations, but by language; and therefore I am always sorry when any language is lost, because languages are the pedigree of nations. If you find the same language in distant countries, you may be sure that the inhabitants of each have been the same people; that is to say, if you find the languages a good deal the same; for a word here and there being the same will not do.”

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 18th.

We had this morning a singular proof of Dr. Johnson's quick and retentive memory. Hay's translation of *Martial* was lying in a window. I said, I thought it was pretty well done, and showed him a particular epigram, I think, of ten, but am certain of eight, lines. He read it, and tossed away the book, saying—“No, it is *not* pretty well.” As I persisted in my opinion, he said, “Why, Sir, the original is thus”—(and he repeated it), “and this man's translation is thus,”—and then he repeated that also, exactly, though he had never seen it before, and read it over only once, and that too, without any intention of getting it by heart.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Oct. 28th.

On Thursday, April 4, having called on Dr. Johnson, I said, it was a pity that truth was not so firm as to bid defiance to all attacks, so that it might be shot at as much as people chose to attempt, and yet remain unhurt. JOHNSON: “Then, Sir, it would not be shot at. Nobody

attempts to dispute that two and two make four: but with contests concerning moral truth, human passions are generally mixed, and therefore it must ever be liable to assault and misrepresentation.”

—*The Life*. 1776, April 4th.

He found fault with me for using the phrase, to *make* money. “Don’t you see,” said he, “the impropriety of it? To *make* money is to *coin* it; you should say *get* money.” The phrase, however, is, I think, pretty current. But Johnson was at all times jealous of infractions upon the genuine English Language, and prompt to repress colloquial barbarisms; such as *pledging myself*, for *undertaking*; *line*, for *department* or *branch*, as the *civil line*, the *banking line*. He was particularly indignant against the almost universal use of the word *idea* in the sense of *notion* or *opinion*, when it is clear that *idea* can only signify something of which an image can be formed in the mind. We may have an *idea* or *image* of a mountain, a tree, a building; but we cannot surely have an *idea* or *image* of an *argument* or *proposition*. Yet we hear the sages of the law “delivering their *ideas* upon the question under consideration”; and the first speakers in Parliament “entirely coincided in the *idea* which has been ably stated by an honourable member”;—or “reprobating an *idea* unconstitutional, and fraught with the most dangerous consequences to a great and free country”. Johnson called this “modern cant”.

—*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 23rd.

He thus defined the difference between physical and moral truth: "Physical truth is, when you tell a thing as it actually is. Moral truth is, when you tell a thing sincerely and precisely as it appears to you. I say such a one walked across the street: if he really did so, I told a physical truth. If I thought so, though I should have been mistaken, I told a moral truth."

—*The Life*. 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's
Johnsoniana.

It is remarkable, that in the *Life* of Broome, Johnson takes notice of Dr. Warburton using a mode of expression which he himself used, and that not seldom, to the great offence of those who did not know him. Having occasion to mention a note, stating the different parts which were executed by the associated translators of *The Odyssey*, he says, "Dr. Warburton told me, in his warm language, that he thought the relation given in the note a *lie*. The language is *warm* indeed; and, I must own, cannot be justified in consistency with a decent regard to the established forms of speech." Johnson had accustomed himself to use the word *lie*, to express a mistake or an error in relation; in short, when the *thing was not so as told*, though the relator did not *mean* to deceive. When he thought there was intentional falsehood in the relator his expression was, "He *lies*, and he *knows* he *lies*."

—*The Life*. 1781.

Johnson's attention to precision and clearness in expression was very remarkable. He dis-

approved of a parenthesis ; and I believe, in all his voluminous writings, not half a dozen of them will be found. He never used the phrases *the former* and *the latter*, having observed that they often occasioned obscurity ; he therefore contrived to construct his sentences so as not to have occasion for them, and would even rather repeat the same words, in order to avoid them. Nothing is more common than to mistake surnames, when we hear them carelessly uttered for the first time. To prevent this, he used not only to pronounce them slowly and distinctly, but to take the trouble of spelling them—a practice which I have often followed, and which I wish were general. —*The Life.* 1783.

The State of Marriage

“Of your love I know not the propriety, nor can estimate the power; but in love, as in every other passion of which hope is the essence, we ought always to remember the uncertainty of events. There is, indeed, nothing that so much seduces reason from vigilance as the thought of passing life with an amiable woman; and if all would happen that a lover fancies, I know not what other terrestrial happiness would deserve pursuit. But love and marriage are different states. Those who are to suffer the evils together, and to suffer often for the sake of one another, soon lose that tenderness of look and that benevolence of mind which arose from the participation of unmingled pleasure and successive amusement. A woman, we are sure, will not be always fair—we are not sure she will always be virtuous; and a man cannot retain through life that respect and assiduity by which he pleases for a day or for a month. I do not, however, pretend to have discovered that life has anything more to be desired than a prudent and virtuous marriage, therefore know not what counsel to give you.”

—*The Life*. 1762, Dec. 21st.

A gentleman talked to him of a lady whom he greatly admired and wished to marry, but was afraid of her superiority of talents. "Sir," said he, "you need not be afraid; marry her. Before a year goes about, you'll find that reason much weaker, and that wit not so bright." Yet the gentleman may be justified in his apprehension by one of Dr. Johnson's admirable sentences in his life of Waller: "He doubtless praised many whom he would have been afraid to marry; and, perhaps, married one whom he would have been ashamed to praise. Many qualities contribute to domestic happiness, upon which poetry has no colours to bestow: and many airs and sallies may delight imagination, which he who flatters them never can approve."

—*The Life.* 1768, Spring.

Although I had promised myself a great deal of instructive conversation with him on the conduct of the married state, of which I had then a near prospect, he did not say much upon that topic. Mr. Seward heard him once say, that "a man has a very bad chance for happiness in that state, unless he marries a woman of very strong and fixed principles of religion". He maintained to me, contrary to the common notion, that a woman would not be the worse wife for being learned; in which, from all that I have observed of *Artemisias*, I humbly differed from him. That a woman should be sensible and well informed, I allow to be a great advantage; and think that Sir Thomas Overbury, in his rude versification, has very judiciously pointed out

that degree of intelligence which is to be desired in a female companion :—

“Give me, next *good*, an *understanding* *wife*,
By nature *wise*, not *learned* by much art,
Some *knowledge* on her side, will all my life
More scope of conversation impart :
Besides, her inborne virtue fortifie.
They are most firmly good, that best know why.”

When I censured a gentlemen of my acquaintance for marrying a second time, as it showed a disregard of his first wife, he said, “Not at all, Sir. On the contrary, were he not to marry again, it might be concluded that his first wife had given him a disgust to marriage; but by taking a second wife he pays the highest compliment to the first, by showing that she made him so happy as a married man, that he wishes to be so a second time.” So ingenious a turn did he give to this delicate question. And yet, on another occasion, he owned that he once had almost asked a promise of Mrs. Johnson that she would not marry again, but had checked himself. Indeed, I cannot help thinking, that in his case the request would have been unreasonable; for if Mrs. Johnson forgot, or thought it no injury to the memory of her first love—the husband of her youth and the father of her children—to make a second marriage, why should she be precluded from a third, should she be so inclined? In Johnson’s persevering fond appropriation of his *Tetty*, even after her decease, he seems totally to have overlooked the prior claim of the honest Birmingham trader. I presume that her having been married before

had, at times, given him some uneasiness ; for I remember his observing upon the marriage of one of our common friends, “ He has done a very foolish thing ; he has married a widow, when he might have had a maid.”

—*The Life*. 1769, Sept. 30th.

I was detained in town till it was too late on the 9th, so went to him early in the morning of the 10th of November. “ Now,” said he, “ that you are going to marry, do not expect more from life than life will afford. You may often find yourself out of humour, and you may often think your wife not studious enough to please you ; and yet you may have reason to consider yourself as upon the whole very happily married.”

Talking of marriage in general, he observed, “ Our marriage service is too refined. It is calculated only for the best kind of marriages ; whereas, we should have a form for matches of convenience, of which there are many.” He agreed with me that there was no absolute necessity for having the marriage ceremony performed by a regular clergyman, for this was not commanded in Scripture.

I was volatile enough to repeat to him a little epigrammatic song of mine, on matrimony, which Mr. Garrick had a few days before procured to be set to music by the very ingenious Mr. Dibdin.

A MATRIMONIAL THOUGHT

“ In the blythe days of honeymoon,
With Kate’s allurements smitten,
I loved her late, I loved her soon,
And call’d her dearest kitten.

“But now my kitten’s grown a cat,
And cross like other wives,
Oh! by my soul, my honest Mat,
I fear she has nine lives.”

My illustrious friend said, “It is very well, Sir; but you should not swear.” Upon which I altered “Oh! by my soul,” to “Alas, alas!”
—*The Life*. 1769, Nov. 10th.

A gentleman who had been very unhappy in marriage, married immediately after his wife died: Johnson said, it was the triumph of hope over experience.

He observed, that a man of sense and education should meet a suitable companion in a wife. It was a miserable thing when the conversation could only be such as, whether the mutton should be boiled or roasted, and probably a dispute about that.

He did not approve of late marriages, observing, that more was lost in point of time, than compensated for by any possible advantages. Even ill assorted marriages were preferable to cheerless celibacy.

—*The Life*. 1770. Dr. Maxwell’s *Collectanea*.

On Tuesday, March 31, he and I dined at General Paoli’s. A question was started whether the state of marriage was natural to man. JOHNSON: “Sir, it is so far from being natural for a man and woman to live in a state of marriage, that we find all the motives which they have for remaining in that connection,

and the restraints which civilized society imposes to prevent separation, are hardly sufficient to keep them together". The General said, "that in a state of nature a man and woman uniting together, would form a strong and constant affection, by the mutual pleasure each would receive; and that the same causes of dissension would not arise between them, as occur between husband and wife in a civilized state." JOHNSON: "Sir, they would have dissensions enough, though of another kind. One would choose to go a-hunting in this wood, the other in that; one would choose to go a-fishing in this lake, the other in that; or perhaps one would choose to go a-hunting, when the other would choose to go a-fishing; and so they would part. Besides, Sir, a savage man and a savage woman meet by chance; and when the man sees another woman that pleases him better, he will leave the first."

—*The Life*. 1772, March 31st

Happening to meet Sir Adam Ferguson, I presented him to Dr. Johnson. Sir Adam expressed some apprehension that the Pantheon would encourage luxury. "Sir," said Johnson, "I am a great friend to public amusements; for they keep people from vice. You now (addressing himself to me), would have been with a wench, had you not been here. Oh! I forgot you were married."

—*The Life*. 1782, March 31st.

/ It was rather worse weather than any that we had yet. At breakfast Dr. Johnson said, "Some cunning men choose fools for their wives, thinking to manage them, but they always fail. There is a spaniel fool and a mule fool. The spaniel fool may be made to do by beating. The mule fool will neither do by words or blows; and the spaniel fool often turns mule at last: and suppose a fool to be made do pretty well, you must have the continual trouble of making her do. Depend upon it, no woman is the worse for sense and knowledge." Whether afterwards he meant merely to say a polite thing, or to give his opinion, I could not be sure; but he added, "Men know that women are an over-match for them, and therefore they choose the weakest or most ignorant. If they did not think so, they never could be afraid of women knowing as much as themselves." In justice to the sex, I think it but candid to acknowledge, that, in a subsequent conversation, he told me that he was serious in what he had said.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 19th.

A young lady who had married a man much her inferior in rank being mentioned, a question arose how a woman's relations should behave to her in such a situation; and, while I recapitulate the debate, and recollect what has since happened, I cannot but be struck in a manner that delicacy forbids me to express. While I contended that she ought to be treated with an inflexible steadiness of displeasure,

Mrs. Thrale was all for mildness and forgiveness, and, according to the vulgar phrase, "making the best of a bad bargain". JOHNSON: "Madam, we must distinguish. Were I a man of rank, I would not let a daughter starve who had made a mean marriage; but having voluntarily degraded herself from the station which she was originally entitled to hold, I would support her only in that which she herself had chosen; and would not put her on a level with my other daughters. You are to consider, Madam, that it is our duty to maintain the subordination of civilized society; and when there is a gross and shameful deviation from rank, it should be punished so as to deter others from the same perversion."

—*The Life*. 1775, March 28th.

We talked of a young gentleman's marriage with an eminent singer, and his determination that she should no longer sing in public, though his father was very earnest she should, because her talents would be liberally rewarded, so as to make her a good fortune. It was questioned whether the young gentleman, who had not a shilling in the world, but was blessed with very uncommon talents, was not foolishly delicate, or foolishly proud, and his father truly rational, without being mean. Johnson, with all the high spirit of a Roman senator, exclaimed, "He resolved wisely and nobly, to be sure. He is a brave man. Would not a gentleman be disgraced by having his wife singing publicly for hire? No, Sir, there can

be no doubt here. I know not if I should not *prepare myself* for a public singer, as readily as let my wife be one."

—*The Life*. 1775, April 11th.

I talked of legitimation by subsequent marriage, which obtained in the Roman law, and still obtains in the law of Scotland. JOHNSON: "I think it a bad thing; because the chastity of women being of the utmost importance, as all property depends upon it, they who forfeit it should not have any possibility of being restored to good character; nor should the children by illicit connection attain the full right of lawful children, by the posterior consent of the offending parties". His opinion upon this subject deserves consideration. Upon his principle there may at times be a hardship, and seemingly a strange one, upon individuals; but the general good of society is better secured. And, after all, it is unreasonable in an individual to repine that he has not the advantage of a state which is made different from his own by the social institution under which he is born. A woman does not complain that her brother who is younger than her gets their common father's estate. Why, then, should a natural son complain that a younger brother, by the same parents lawfully begotten, gets it? The operation of law is similar in both cases. Besides, an illegitimate son, who has a younger legitimate brother by the same father and mother, has no stronger claim to the father's estate, than if that legitimate brother had only

the same father, from whom alone the estate descends.

Mr. Lloyd joined us in the street, and in a little while we met *Friend Hector*, as Mr. Lloyd called him. It gave me pleasure to observe the joy which Johnson and he expressed on seeing each other again. Mr. Lloyd and I left them together, while he obligingly showed me some of the manufactures of this very curious assemblage of artificers. We all met at dinner at Mr. Lloyd's, where we were entertained with great hospitality. Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd had been married the same year with their Majesties, and like them, had been blessed with a numerous family of fine children, their numbers being exactly the same. Johnson said, "Marriage is the best state for a man in general; and every man is a worse man in proportion as he is unfit for the married state."

—*The Life*. 1776, March 22nd.

Dr. Johnson said to me in the morning, "You will see, Sir, at Mr. Hector's, his sister, Mrs. Careless, a clergyman's widow. She was the first woman with whom I was in love. It dropt out of my head imperceptibly: but she and I shall always have a kindness for each other." He laughed at the notion that a man can never be really in love but once, and considered it as a mere romantic fancy.

On our return from Mr. Boulton's, Mr. Hector took me to his house, where we found Johnson sitting placidly at tea, with his *first love*; who though now advanced in years, was

a genteel woman, very agreeable and well bred.

When he again talked of Mrs. Careless to-night, he seemed to have had his affection revived; for he said, "If I had married her, it might have been as happy for me." BOSWELL: "Pray, Sir, do you not suppose that there are fifty women in the world, with any one of whom a man may be as happy as with any one woman in particular". JOHNSON: "Ay, Sir, fifty thousand". BOSWELL: "Then, Sir, you are not of opinion with some who imagine that certain men and certain women are made for each other; and that they cannot be happy if they miss their counterparts". JOHNSON: "To be sure not, Sir. I believe marriages would in general be as happy, and often more so, if they were all made by the Lord Chancellor, upon a due consideration of the characters and circumstances, without the parties having any choice in the matter."

—*The Life*. 1776, March 22nd.

JOHNSON: "Marriage, Sir, is much more necessary to a man than to a woman: for he is much less able to supply himself with domestic comforts. You will recollect my saying to some ladies the other day, that I had often wondered why young women should marry, as they have so much more freedom, and so much more attention paid to them while unmarried than when married. I indeed did not mention the *strong* reason for their marrying—the *mechanical* reason." BOSWELL: "Why that is a strong one. But does not imagination

make it much more important than it is in reality? Is it not, to a certain degree, a delusion in us as well as in women?" JOHNSON: "Why yes, Sir; but it is a delusion that is always beginning again". BOSWELL: "I don't know but there is upon the whole more misery than happiness produced by that passion". JOHNSON: "I don't think so, Sir".

—*The Life*. 1776, March 25th.

He said, "It is commonly a weak man who marries for love." We then talked of marrying women of fortune; and I mentioned a common remark, that a man may be, upon the whole, richer by marrying a woman with a very small portion, because a woman of fortune will be proportionally expensive; whereas a woman who brings none will be very moderate in expenses. JOHNSON: "Depend upon it, Sir, this is not true. A woman of fortune, being used to the handling of money, spends it judiciously; but a woman who gets the command of money for the first time upon her marriage, has such a gust in spending it, that she throws it away with great profusion."

—*The Life*. 1776, March 28th.

At Streatham, on Monday March 29, at breakfast, he maintained that a father had no right to control the inclinations of his daughters in marriage.

—*The Life*. 1779, March 29th.

THE STATE OF THE WORLD
“The loss, dear Sir, which you have lately suffered, I felt many years ago, and know, therefore, how much has been taken from you, and how little help can be had from consolation. He that outlives a wife whom he has loved, sees himself disjointed from the only mind that has the same hopes, and fears, and interest; from the only companion with whom he has shared much good or evil; and with whom he could set his mind at liberty, to retrace the past or anticipate the future. The continuity of being is lacerated; the settled course of sentiment and action is stopped: and life stands suspended and motionless, till it is driven by external causes into a new channel. But the time of suspense is dreadful.

“Our first recourse, in this distressed solitude, is, perhaps for want of habitual piety, to a gloomy acquiescence in necessity. Of two mortal beings, one must lose the other; but surely there is a higher and better comfort to be drawn from the consideration of that Providence which watches over all, and a belief that the living and the dead are equally in the hands of God, who will reunite those whom he has separated; or who sees that it is best not to reunite.”
—*The Life*. 1780, Jan. 20th.

On Tuesday, June 15th, Johnson was to return to London. He was very pleasant at breakfast. I mentioned a friend of mine having resolved never to marry a pretty woman. JOHNSON: “Sir, it is a very foolish resolution to resolve not to marry a pretty woman. Beauty

is of itself very estimable. No, Sir, I would prefer a pretty woman, unless there are objections to her. A pretty woman may be foolish; a pretty woman may be wicked; a pretty woman may not like me. But there is no such danger in marrying a pretty woman as is apprehended; she will not be persecuted if she does not invite persecution. A pretty woman, if she has a mind to be wicked, can find a readier way than another: and that is all."

—*The Life*. 1781, June 5th.

I praised the accuracy of an account-book of a lady whom I mentioned. JOHNSON: "Keeping accounts, Sir, is of no use when a man is spending his own money, and has nobody to whom he is to account. You won't eat less beef to-day, because you have written down what it cost yesterday." I mentioned another lady who thought as he did, so that her husband could not get her to keep an account of the expense of the family, as she thought it enough that she never exceeded the sum allowed her. JOHNSON: "Sir, it is fit she should keep an account, because her husband wishes it; but I do not see its use." I maintained that keeping an account had this advantage, that it satisfies a man that his money has not been lost or stolen, which he might sometimes be apt to imagine, were there no written state of his expense; and besides, a calculation of economy, so as not to exceed one's income, cannot be made without a view of the different articles in figures, that one may see how to re-

trench in some particulars less necessary than others. This he did not attempt to answer.

—*The Life.* 1783.

After dinner, when one of us talked of there being a great enmity between Whig and Tory:—JOHNSON: “Why, not so much, I think, unless when they come into competition with each other. There is none when they are only common acquaintance, none when they are of different sexes. A Tory will marry into a Whig family, and a Whig into a Tory family, without any reluctance. But indeed, in a matter of much more concern than political tenets, and that is religion, men and women do not concern themselves much about difference of opinion; and ladies set no value on the moral character of men who pay their addresses to them; the greatest profligate will be as well received as the man of the greatest virtue, and this by a very good woman, by a woman who says her prayers three times a day.” Our ladies endeavoured to defend their sex from this charge; but he roared them down! “No, no! a lady will take Jonathan Wild as readily as St. Austin, if he has threepence more; and, what is worse, her parents will give her to him. Women have a perpetual envy of our vices; they are less vicious than we, not from choice, but because we restrict them; they are the slaves of order and fashion; their virtue is of more consequence to us than our own, so far as concerns this world.”

Miss Adams mentioned a gentleman of licentious character, and said, "Suppose I had a mind to marry that gentleman, would my parents consent?" JOHNSON: "Yes, they'd consent, and you'd go. You'd go, though they did not consent." MISS ADAMS: "Perhaps their opposing might make me go". JOHNSON: "Oh, very well; you'd take one whom you think a bad man, to have the pleasure of vexing your parents. You put me in mind of Dr. Barrowby, the physician, who was very fond of swine's flesh. One day, when he was eating it, he said, 'I wish I was a Jew.'—'Why so?' said somebody; 'the Jews are not allowed to eat your favourite meat.'—'Because,' said he, 'I should then have the gust of eating it, with the pleasure of sinning.'" Johnson then proceeded in his declamation.

Miss Adams soon afterwards made an observation that I do not recollect, which pleased him much; he said, with a good-humoured smile, "That there should be so much excellence united with so much *depravity* is strange."

Indeed, this lady's good qualities, merit, and accomplishments, and her constant attention to Dr. Johnson, were not lost upon him. She happened to tell him that a little coffee-pot, in which she had made him coffee, was the only thing she could call her own. He turned to her with a complacent gallantry. "Don't say so, my dear; I hope you don't reckon my heart as nothing."

—*The Life*. 1784, June 10th.

On Monday, June 14th, and Tuesday, 15th, Dr. Johnson and I dined (on one of them, I forget which) with Mr. Mickle, translator of *The Lusiad*, at Wheatley,—a very pretty country place a few miles from Oxford; and on the other with Dr. Wetherell, Master of University College. From Dr. Wetherell's he went to visit Mr. Sackville Parker, the bookseller; and when he returned to us he gave the following account of his visit, saying, "I have been to see my old friend, Sack. Parker; I find he has married his maid; he has done right. She had lived with him many years in great confidence, and they had mingled minds; I do not think he could have found any wife that would have made him so happy. The woman was very attentive and civil to me; she pressed me to fix a day for dining with them, and to say what I liked, and she would be sure to get it for me. Poor Sack.! he is very ill indeed. We parted as never to meet again. It has quite broken me down." This pathetic narrative was strangely diversified with the grave and earnest defence of a man's having married his maid. I could not but feel it as in some degree ludicrous. —*The Life*. 1784, June 14th.

The Ethics of Convivial Drinking

Next morning Mr. Dempster happened to call on me, and was so much struck even with the imperfect account which I gave him of Dr. Johnson's conversation, that to his honour be it recorded, when I complained of drinking port and sitting up late with him, affected my nerves for some time after, he said, "One had better be palsied at eighteen than not keep company with such a man."

—*The Life*. 1763, July 15th

At night I supped with him at the Mitre tavern, that we might renew our social intimacy at the original place of meeting. But there was now a considerable difference in his way of living. Having had an illness, in which he was advised to leave off wine, he had, from that period, continued to abstain from it, and drink only water or lemonade.

—*The Life*. 1766, February.

He said few people had intellectual resources sufficient to forego the pleasures of wine. They

could not otherwise contrive how to fill the interval between dinner and supper.

—*The Life*. 1770. Dr. Maxwell's *Collectanea*.

Desirous of calling Johnson forth to talk and exercise his wit, though I should myself be the object of it, I resolutely ventured to undertake the defence of convivial indulgence in wine, though he was not to-night in the most genial humour. After urging the common plausible topics, I at last had recourse to the maxim *in vino veritas*, a man who is well warmed with wine will speak truth. JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, that may be an argument for drinking, if you suppose men in general to be liars. But, Sir, I would not keep company with a fellow who lies as long as he is sober, and whom you must make drunk before you can get a word of truth out of him."

—*The Life*. 1772, April 15th.

A gentleman having, to some of the usual arguments for drinking, added this: "You know, Sir, drinking drives away care, and makes us forget whatever is disagreeable. Would not you allow a man to drink for that reason?" JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, if he sat next *you*".

—*The Life*. 1772, April.

We talked of change of manners. Dr. Johnson observed, that our drinking less than our ancestors was owing to the change from ale to wine. "I remember," said he, "when all the *decent* people in Lichfield got drunk every night,

and were not the worse thought of. Ale was cheap, so you pressed strongly. When a man must bring a bottle of wine, he is not in such haste. Smoking has gone out. To be sure, it is a shocking thing, blowing smoke out of our mouths into other people's mouths, eyes, and noses, and having the same thing done to us. Yet I cannot account why a thing which requires so little exertion, and yet preserves the mind from total vacuity, should have gone out. Every man has something by which he calms himself: beating with his feet, or so."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 19th.

After supper, Dr. Johnson told us, that Isaac Hawkins Browne drank freely for thirty years, and that he wrote his poem, *De Animi Immortalitate*, in some of the last of these years. I listened to this with the eagerness of one, who, conscious of being himself fond of wine, is glad to hear that a man of so much genius and good thinking as Browne had the same propensity.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 5th.

Last night much care was taken of Dr. Johnson, who was still distressed by his cold. He had hitherto most strangely slept without a night-cap. Miss M'Leod made him a large flannel one, and he was prevailed with to drink a little brandy when he was going to bed. He has great virtue in not drinking wine or any fermented liquor, because, as he acknowledged to us, he could not do it in moderation. Lady M'Leod would hardly believe him, and said, "I

am sure, Sir, you would not carry it too far.”
JOHNSON: “Nay, Madam, it carried me. I took the opportunity of a long illness to leave it off. It was then prescribed to me not to drink wine; and having broken off the habit, I have never returned to it.”

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 16th.

As we sailed along Dr. Johnson got into one of his fits of railing at the Scots. He owned that they had been a very learned nation for a hundred years, from about 1550 to about 1650; but that they afforded the only instance of a people among whom the arts of civil life did not advance in proportion with learning; that they had hardly any trade, any money, or any elegance, before the Union; that it was strange that, with all the advantages possessed by other nations, they had not any of those conveniences and embellishments which are the fruit of industry, till they came in contact with a civilized people. “We have taught you,” said he, “and we’ll do the same in time to all barbarous nations,—to the Cherokees,—and at last to the Orang-Outangs;” laughing with as much glee as if Monboddo had been present. BOSWELL: “We had wine before the Union”. JOHNSON: “No, Sir; you had some weak stuff, the refuse of France, which would not make you drunk”. BOSWELL: “I assure you, Sir, there was a great deal of drunkenness”. JOHNSON: “No, Sir; there were people who died of dropsies, which they contracted in trying to get drunk”. —*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 23rd.

I awaked at noon, with a severe headache. I was much vexed that I should have been guilty of such a riot, and afraid of a reproof from Dr. Johnson. I thought it very inconsistent with that conduct which I ought to maintain, while the companion of the Rambler. About one he came into my room, and accosted me, "What, drunk yet?" His tone of voice was not that of severe upbraiding; so I was relieved a little. "Sir," said I, "they kept me up." He answered, "No, you kept them up, you drunken dog." This he said with good-humoured *English* pleasantry. Soon afterwards, Corrichatachin, Col, and other friends assembled round my bed. Corri had a brandy bottle and glass with him, and insisted I should take a dram. "Ay," said Johnson, "fill him drunk again. Do it in the morning, that we may laugh at him all day. It is a poor thing for a fellow to get drunk at night, and skulk to bed, and let his friends have no sport." Finding him thus jocular, I became quite easy; and when I offered to get up, he very good-naturedly said, "You need be in no such hurry now." I took my host's advice, and drank some brandy, which I found an effectual cure for my headache. When I rose, I went into Dr. Johnson's room, and taking up Mrs. M'Kinnon's Prayer-book, I opened it at the twentieth Sunday after Trinity, in the epistle for which I read, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein there is excess". Some would have taken this as a divine interposition.

This was another day of wind and rain;

but good cheer and good society helped to beguile the time. I felt myself comfortable enough in the afternoon. I then thought that my last night's riot was no more than such a social excess as may happen without much moral blame; and recollected that some physicians maintained that a fever produced by it was, upon the whole, good for health: so different are our reflections on the same subject, at different periods; and such the excuses with which we palliate what we know to be wrong.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 26th.

Dr. Johnson here showed so much spirit of a Highlander, that he won Sir Allan's heart: indeed, he has shown it during the whole of our Tour. One night, in Col, he strutted about the room with a broad sword and target, and made a formidable appearance; and, another night, I took the liberty to put a large blue bonnet on his head. His age, his size, and his bushy gray wig, with this covering on it, presented the image of a venerable *Senachi*: and, however unfavourable to the Lowland Scots, he seemed much pleased to assume the appearance of an ancient Caledonian. We only regretted that he could not be prevailed with to partake of the social glass. One of his arguments against drinking, appears to me not convincing. He urged, that, "in proportion as drinking makes a man different from what he is before he has drunk, it is bad; because it has so far affected his reason". But may it not be answered, that a man may be altered by

it *for the better*; that his spirits may be exhilarated, without his reason being affected? On the general subject of drinking, however, I do not mean positively to take the other side. I am *dubius, non improbus*.

—*The Tour*. 1773, Oct. 17th.

The prospect of good accommodation cheered us much. We supped well; and after supper, Dr. Johnson, whom I had not seen taste any fermented liquor during all our travels, called for a gill of whisky. "Come," said he, "let me know what it is that makes a Scotchman happy!" He drank it all but a drop, which I begged leave to pour into my glass, that I might say we had drunk whisky together. I proposed Mrs. Thrale should be our toast. He would not have *her* drunk in whisky, but rather "some insular lady"; so we drank one of the ladies whom we had lately left. He owned to-night, that he got as good a room and bed as at an English inn.

—*The Tour*. 1773, Oct. 23

"Reynolds has taken too much to strong liquor, and seems to delight in his new character."

—*The Life*. 1775, Jan. 1st.

Finding him still persevering in his abstinence from wine, I ventured to speak to him of it. JOHNSON: "Sir, I have no objection to a man's drinking wine, if he can do it in moderation. I found myself apt to go to excess in it, and therefore, after having been for some time without it, on account of ill-

ness, I thought it better not to return to it. Every man is to judge for himself, according to the effects which he experiences. One of the Fathers tells us, he found fasting made him so peevish that he did not practise it."

Though he often enlarged upon the evil of intoxication, he was by no means harsh and unforgiving to those who indulged in occasional excess in wine. One of his friends, I well remember, came to sup at a tavern with him and some other gentlemen, and too plainly discovered that he had drunk too much at dinner. When one who loved mischief, thinking to produce a severe censure, asked Johnson, a few days afterwards, "Well, Sir, what did your friend say to you, as an apology for being in such a situation?" Johnson answered: "Sir, he said all that a man *should* say: he said he was sorry for it."

I heard him once give a very judicious practical advice upon this subject: "A man who has been drinking wine at all freely, should never go into a new company. With those who have partaken of wine with him he may be pretty well in unison, but he will probably be offensive or appear ridiculous to other people." —*The Life.* 1776, March, 16th.

Johnson and I supped this evening at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, in company with Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mr. Langton, Mr. Nairne, now one of the Scotch judges, with the title of Lord Dunsinan, and my very worthy friend, Sir William Forbes, of Pitsligo.

We discussed the question whether drinking improved conversation and benevolence. Sir Joshua maintained it did. JOHNSON: "No, Sir, before dinner men meet with great inequality of understanding; and those who are conscious of their inferiority have the modesty not to talk. When they have drunk wine, every man feels himself happy, and loses that modesty, and grows impudent and vociferous: but he is not improved: he is only not sensible of his defects." Sir Joshua said the Doctor was talking of the effects of excess in wine; but that a moderate glass enlivened the mind, by giving a proper circulation to the blood. "I am," said he, "in very good spirits, when I get up in the morning. By dinner-time I am exhausted; wine puts me in the same state as when I got up; and I am sure that moderate drinking makes people talk better." JOHNSON: "No, Sir, wine gives no light, gay, ideal hilarity; but tumultuous, noisy, clamorous merriment. I have heard none of those drunken—nay, drunken is a coarse word—none of those *vinous* flights." SIR JOSHUA: "Because you have sat by, quite sober, and felt an envy of the happiness of those who were drinking." JOHNSON: "Perhaps contempt. And, Sir, it is not necessary to be drunk one's self to relish the wit of drunkenness. Do we not judge of the drunken wit, and of the dialogue between Iago and Cassio, the most excellent in its kind, when we are quite sober? Wit is wit, by whatever means it is produced: and, if good, will appear so at all times. I admit that the

spirits are raised by drinking, as by the common participation of any pleasure: cock-fighting or bear-baiting will raise the spirits of a company as drinking does, though surely they will not improve conversation. I also admit, that there are some sluggish men who are improved by drinking; as there are fruits which are not good till they are rotten. There are such men, but they are medlars. I indeed allow that there have been a very few men of talents who were improved by drinking; but I maintain that I am right as to the effects of drinking in general: and let it be considered, that there is no position, however false in its universality, which is not true of some particular man." Sir William Forbes said, "Might not a man warmed with wine be like a bottle of beer, which is made brisker by being set before the fire?" "Nay," said Johnson, laughing, "I cannot answer that: that is too much for me."

I observed that wine did some people harm, by inflaming, confusing, and irritating their minds; but that the experience of mankind had declared in favour of moderate drinking. JOHNSON: "Sir, I do not say it is wrong to produce self-complacency by drinking; I only deny that it improves the mind. When I drank wine I scorned to drink it when in company. I have drunk many a bottle by myself; in the first place, because I had need of it to raise my spirits; in the second place, because I would have nobody to witness its effects upon me."

—*The Life*. 1776, April 12th.

“Every man is to take existence on the terms on which it is given to him. To some men it is given on condition of not taking liberties, which other men may take without much harm. One may drink wine, and be nothing the worse for it; on another, wine may have effects so inflammatory as to injure him both in body and mind, and perhaps make him commit something for which he may deserve to be hanged.”

—*The Life.* 1776, May.

As we drove back to Ashbourne, Dr. Johnson recommended to me, as he had often done, to drink water only: “For,” said he, “you are then sure not to get drunk; whereas, if you drink wine, you are never sure.” I said, drinking wine was a pleasure which I was unwilling to give up. “Why, Sir,” said he, “there is no doubt that not to drink wine is a great deduction from life: but it may be necessary.” He, however, owned that, in his opinion, a free use of wine did not shorten life; and said, he would not give less for the life of a certain Scotch Lord (whom he named), celebrated for hard drinking, than for that of a sober man. “But stay,” said he, with his usual intelligence and accuracy of enquiry, “does it take much wine to make him drunk?” I answered, “A great deal either of wine or strong punch.” “Then,” said he, “that is the worse.” I presume to illustrate my friend’s observation thus:—“A fortress which soon surrenders has its walls less shattered, than when a long and obstinate resistance is made.”—*The Life.* 1777, Sept. 19th.

E.: "I understand the hogshhead of claret, which this society was favoured with by our friend the Dean, is nearly out; I think he should be written to, to send another of the same kind. Let the request be made with a happy ambiguity of expression, so that we may have the chance of his sending *it* also as a present." JOHNSON: "I am willing to offer my services as secretary on this occasion". P.: "As many as are for Dr. Johnson being secretary hold up your hands.—Carried unanimously." BOSWELL: "He will be our Dictator". JOHNSON: "No, the company is to dictate to me. I am only to write for wine: and I am quite disinterested, as I drink none; I shall not be suspected of having forged the application. I am no more than humble *scribe*." E.: "Then you shall *pre*-scribe". BOSWELL: "Very well. The first play of words to-day". J.: "No, no; the *bulls* in Ireland". JOHNSON: "Were I your Dictator, you should have no wine. It would be my business *cavere ne quid detrimenti Respublica caperet*, and wine is dangerous. Rome was ruined by luxury" (smiling). E.: "If you allow no wine as Dictator, you shall not have me for your master of horse."

—*The Life*. 1778, April 3rd.

Talking of drinking wine, he said, "I did not leave off wine because I could not bear it! I have drunk three bottles of port without being the worse for it. University College has witnessed this." BOSWELL: "Why then, Sir, did you leave it off?" JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, be-

cause it is much better for a man to be sure that he is never to be intoxicated, never to lose the power over himself. I shall not begin to drink wine till I grow old and want it." BOSWELL: "I think, Sir, you once said to me, that not to drink wine was a great deduction from life". JOHNSON: "It is a diminution of pleasure, to be sure; but I do not say a diminution of happiness. There is more happiness in being rational." BOSWELL: "But if we could have pleasure always, should not we be happy? The greatest part of men would compound for pleasure." JOHNSON: "Supposing we could have pleasure always, an intellectual man would not compound for it. The greatest part of men would compound, because the greatest part of men are gross." BOSWELL: "I allow there may be greater pleasure than from wine. I have had more pleasure from your conversation. I have indeed; I assure you I have." JOHNSON: "When we talk of pleasure, we mean sensual pleasure. When a man says, he had pleasure with a woman, he does not mean conversation, but something of a very different nature. Philosophers tell you that pleasure is *contrary* to happiness. Gross men prefer animal pleasure. So there are men who have preferred living among savages. Now what a wretch must he be, who is content with such conversation as can be had among savages! You may remember an officer at Fort Augustus, who had served in America, told us of a woman whom they were obliged to *bind*, in order to get her back from savage life." BOSWELL: "She must have

been an animal, a beast". JOHNSON: "Sir, she was a speaking cat".

—*The Life*. 1778, April 7th.

Talking of a man's resolving to deny himself the use of wine, from moral and religious considerations, he said, "He must not doubt about it. When one doubts as to pleasure, we know what will be the conclusion. I now no more think of drinking wine than a horse does. The wine upon the table is no more for me than for the dog that is under the table."

—*The Life*. 1778, April 8th.

EDWARDS: "How do you live, Sir? For my part I must have my regular meals, and a glass of good wine. I find I require it." JOHNSON: "I now drink no wine, Sir. Early in life I drank wine: for many years I drank none. I then for some years drank a great deal." EDWARDS: "Some hogsheads, I warrant you". JOHNSON: "I then had a severe illness, and left it off, and I have never begun it again. I never felt any difference upon myself from eating one thing rather than another. There are people, I believe, who feel a difference; but I am not one of them. And as to regular meals, I have fasted from the Sunday's dinner to the Tuesday's dinner without any inconvenience. I believe it is best to eat just as one is hungry: but a man who is in business, or a man who has a family, must have stated meals. I am a straggler. I may leave this town and go to Grand Cairo, without being missed here or observed there."

EDWARDS: "Don't you eat supper, Sir?" JOHNSON: "No, Sir". EDWARDS: "For my part, now, I consider supper as a turnpike through which one must pass, in order to get to bed". JOHNSON: "You are a lawyer, Mr. Edwards. Lawyers know life practically. A bookish man should always have them to converse with. They have what he wants." EDWARDS: "I am grown old: I am sixty-five". JOHNSON: "I shall be sixty-eight next birthday. Come, Sir, drink water, and put in for a hundred."

—*The Life*. 1778, April 17th.

We talked of drinking wine. JOHNSON: "I require wine only when I am alone. I have then often wished for it, and often taken it." SPOTTISWOODE: "What, by way of a companion, Sir?" JOHNSON: "To get rid of myself—to send myself away. Wine gives great pleasure, and every pleasure is of itself a good. It is a good, unless counterbalanced by evil. A man may have a strong reason not to drink wine; and that may be greater than the pleasure. Wine makes a man better pleased with himself. I do not say that it makes him more pleasing to others. Sometimes it does. But the danger is, that while a man grows better pleased with himself, he may be growing less pleasing to others. Wine gives a man nothing. It neither gives him knowledge nor wit; it only animates a man, and enables him to bring out what a dread of the company has repressed. It only puts in motion what has been locked up in frost. But this may be good or it may be bad."

SPOTTISWOODE: "So, Sir, wine is a key which opens a box; but this box may be either full or empty?" JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir, conversation is the key; wine is a picklock, which forces open the box, and injures it. A man should cultivate his mind so as to have that confidence and readiness, without wine, which wine gives." BOSWELL: "The great difficulty of resisting wine is from benevolence. For instance, a good worthy man asks you to taste his wine, which he has had twenty years in his cellar." JOHNSON: "Sir, all this notion about benevolence arises from a man's imagining himself to be of more importance to others than he really is. They don't care a farthing whether he drinks wine or not." SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS: "Yes, they do for the time". JOHNSON: "For the time!—if they care this minute, they forget it the next. And as for the good worthy man—how do you know he is good and worthy? No good and worthy man will insist upon another man's drinking wine. As to the wine twenty years in the cellar—of ten men, three say this, merely because they must say something; three are telling a lie, when they say they have had the wine twenty years; three would rather save the wine; one, perhaps, cares. I allow it is something to please one's company; and people are always pleased with those who partake pleasure with them. But after a man has brought himself to relinquish the great personal pleasure which arises from drinking wine, any other consideration is a trifle. To please others by drinking wine, is something only, if there be

nothing against it. I should, however, be sorry to offend worthy men :

‘Curst be the verse, how well soe’er it flow,
That tends to make one worthy man my foe’.”

BOSWELL: “Curst be the *spring*, the *water*”.

JOHNSON: “But let us consider what a sad thing it would be, if we were obliged to drink or do anything else that may happen to be agreeable to the company where we are”.

LANGTON: “By the same rule you must join with a gang of cutpurses”.

JOHNSON: “Yes, Sir; but yet we must do justice to wine; we must allow it the power it possesses. To make a man pleased with himself, let me tell you, is doing a very great thing:—

‘Si patriæ volumus, si nobis vivere cari’.”

I was at this time myself a water-drinker, upon trial, upon Johnson’s recommendation.

JOHNSON: “Boswell is a bolder combatant than Sir Joshua; he argues for wine without the help of wine; but Sir Joshua with it”.

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS: “But to please one’s company is a strong motive”.

JOHNSON (who from drinking only water supposed everybody who drank wine to be elevated): “I won’t argue any more with you, Sir. You are too far gone.”

SIR JOSHUA: “I should have thought so indeed, Sir, had I made such a speech as you have now done”.

JOHNSON (drawing himself in, and I really thought blushing): “Nay, don’t be angry. I did not mean to offend you.”

SIR JOSHUA: “At first the taste of wine was disagreeable to

me; but I brought myself to drink it, that I might be like other people. The pleasure of drinking wine is so connected with pleasing your company, that altogether there is something of social goodness in it." JOHNSON: "This is only saying the same thing over again". SIR JOSHUA: "No, this is new". JOHNSON: "You put it in new words, but it is an old thought. This is one of the disadvantages of wine, it makes a man mistake words for thoughts." BOSWELL: "I think it is a new thought; at least it is in a new *attitude*". JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir, it is only in a new coat; or an old coat with a new facing. (Then laughing heartily)—It is the old dog in a new doublet. An extraordinary instance, however, may occur where a man's patron will do nothing for him, unless he will drink: *there* may be a good reason for drinking."

I mentioned a nobleman, who I believed was really uneasy, if his company would not drink hard. JOHNSON: "That is from having had people about him whom he has been accustomed to command". BOSWELL: "Suppose I should be *tête-à-tête* with him at table". JOHNSON: "Sir, there is no more occasion for your drinking with *him*, than his being sober with *you*". BOSWELL: "Why, that is true; for it would do him less hurt to be sober, than it would do me to get drunk". JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir: and from what I have heard of him, one would not wish to sacrifice himself to such a man. If he must always have somebody to drink with him, he should buy a slave, and then he would be

sure to have it. They who submit to drink as another pleases, make themselves his slaves."

BOSWELL: "But, Sir, you will surely make allowance for the duty of hospitality. A gentleman who loves drinking comes to visit me."

JOHNSON: "Sir, a man knows whom he visits; he comes to the table of a sober man".

BOSWELL: "But, Sir, you and I should not have been so well received in the Highlands and Hebrides, if I had not drunk with our worthy friends. If I had drunk water only as you did, they would not have been so cordial."

JOHNSON: "Sir William Temple mentions, that in his travels through the Netherlands he had two or three gentlemen with him; and when a bumper was necessary, he put it on *them*. Were I to travel again through the islands, I would have Sir Joshua with me to take the bumpers."

BOSWELL: "But, Sir, let me put a case. Suppose Sir Joshua should take a jaunt into Scotland; he does me the honour to pay me a visit at my house in the country; I am overjoyed at seeing him; we are quite by ourselves: shall I unsociably and churlishly let him sit drinking by himself? No, no, my dear Sir Joshua, you shall not be treated so, I *will* take a bottle with you."

—*The Life*. 1778, April 28th.

Johnson harangued against drinking wine. "A man," said he, "may choose whether he will have abstemiousness and knowledge, or claret and ignorance." Dr. Robertson (who is very companionable) was beginning to dissent as to the proscription of claret. JOHNSON (with a placid

smile) : “ Nay, Sir, you shall not differ with me ; as I have said that the man is most perfect who takes in the most things, I am for knowledge and claret”. ROBERTSON (holding a glass of generous claret in his hand) : “ Sir, I can only drink your health”. JOHNSON : “ Sir, I should be sorry if *you* should be ever in such a state as to be able to do nothing more”.

—*The Life*. 1778, April 29th.

On Wednesday, April 7, I dined with him at Sir Joshua Reynolds's. I have not marked what company was there. Johnson harangued upon the qualities of different liquors ; and spoke with great contempt of claret, as so weak, that “ a man would be drowned by it before it made him drunk”. He was persuaded to drink one glass of it, that he might judge, not from recollection, which might be dim, but from immediate sensation. He shook his head, and said, “ Poor stuff! No, Sir, claret is the liquor for boys ; port for men : but he who aspires to be a hero (smiling) must drink brandy. In the first place, the flavour of brandy is most grateful to the palate ; and then brandy will do soonest for a man what drinking *can* do for him. There are, indeed, few who are able to drink brandy. That is a power rather to be wished for than attained. And yet,” proceeded he, “ as in all pleasure hope is a considerable part, I know not but fruition comes too quick by brandy. Florence wine I think the worst ; it is wine only to the eye ; it is wine neither while you are drinking it, nor after you have drunk it ; it

neither pleases the taste, nor exhilarates the spirits." I reminded him how heartily he and I used to drink wine together, when we were first acquainted; and how I used to have a headache after sitting up with him. He did not like to have this recalled, or, perhaps, thinking that I boasted improperly, resolved to have a witty stroke at me: "Nay, Sir, it was not the *wine* that made your head ache, but the *sense* that I put into it." BOSWELL: "What, Sir, will sense make the head ache?" JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir (with a smile), when it is not used to it".—No man who has a true relish of pleasantry could be offended at this; especially if Johnson in a long intimacy had given him repeated proofs of his regard and good estimation. I used to say, that as he had given me £1000 in praise, he had a good right now and then to take a guinea from me.

—*The Life.* 1779, April 7th.

Talking of the effects of drinking, he said, "Drinking may be practised with great prudence; a man who exposes himself when he is intoxicated, has not the art of getting drunk; a sober man who happens occasionally to get drunk, readily enough goes into a new company, which a man who has been drinking should never do. Such a man will undertake anything; he is without skill in inebriation. I used to slink home when I had drunk too much. A man accustomed to self-examination will be conscious when he is drunk, though an habitual drunkard will not be conscious of it. I knew a physician who for

twenty years was not sober ; yet in a pamphlet, which he wrote upon fevers, he appealed to Garrick and me for his vindication from a charge of drunkenness. A bookseller (naming him), who got a large fortune by trade, was so habitually and equally drunk, that his most intimate friends never perceived that he was more sober at one time than another."

—*The Life*. 1779, April 24th.

He told me I might now have the pleasure to see Dr. Johnson drink wine again, for he had lately returned to it. When I mentioned this to Johnson, he said, "I drink it now sometimes, but not socially." The first evening that I was with him at Thrale's, I observed he poured a large quantity of it into a glass, and swallowed it greedily. Everything about his character and manners was forcible and violent ; there never was any moderation ; many a day did he fast, many a year did he refrain from wine ; but when he did eat, it was voraciously ; when he did drink wine, it was copiously. He could practise abstinence, but not temperance.

—*The Life*. 1781, March 21st.

On Friday. March 30, I dined with him at Sir Joshua Reynolds's, with the Earl of Charlemont, Sir Annesley Stewart, Mr. Eliot, of Port-Eliot, Mr. Burke, Dean Marlay, Mr. Langton : a most agreeable day, of which I regret that every circumstance is not preserved ; but it is unreasonable to require such a multiplication of felicity.

Mr. Eliot mentioned a curious liquor peculiar to his country, which the Cornish fishermen drink. They call it *Mahogany*; and it is made of two parts gin, and one part treacle, well beaten together. I begged to have some of it made, which was done with proper skill by Mr. Eliot. I thought it very good liquor; and said it was a counterpart of what is called *Athole Porridge* in the Highlands of Scotland, which is a mixture of whiskey and honey. Johnson said, "That must be a better liquor than the Cornish, for both its component parts are better." He also observed, "*Mahogany* must be a modern name; for it is not long since the wood called mahogany was known in this country." I mentioned his scale of liquors:—claret for boys,—port for men,—brandy for heroes. "Then," said Mr. Burke, "let me have claret: I love to be a boy; to have the careless gaiety of boyish days." JOHNSON: "I should drink claret too, if it would give me that; but it does not: it neither makes boys men, nor men boys. You'll be drowned by it, before it has any effect upon you."

—*The Life*. 1781, March 30th.

On Sunday, April 15, being Easter Day, after solemn worship in St. Paul's Church, I found him alone; Dr. Scott, of the commons, came in. He talked of its having been said, that Addison wrote some of his best papers in *The Spectator*, when warm with wine. Dr. Johnson did not seem willing to admit this. Dr. Scott, as a confirmation of it, related that Blackstone, a sober man, composed his *Commentaries* with a

bottle of port before him ; and found his mind invigorated and supported, in the fatigue of his great work, by a temperate use of it.

—*The Life*. 1781, April 15th.

Another evening Johnson's kind indulgence towards me had a pretty difficult trial. I had dined at the Duke of Montrose's with a very agreeable party, and his Grace, according to his usual custom, had circulated the bottle very freely. Lord Graham and I went together to Miss Monckton's, where I certainly was in extraordinary spirits, and above all fear or awe. In the midst of a great number of persons of the first rank, amongst whom I recollect, with confusion, a noble lady of the most stately decorum, I placed myself next to Johnson, and thinking myself now fully his match, talked to him in a loud and boisterous manner, desirous to let the company know how I could contend with *Ajax*. I particularly remember pressing him upon the value of the pleasures of the imagination, and as an illustration of my argument, asking him, "What, Sir, supposing I were to fancy that the —— (naming the most charming Duchess in his Majesty's dominions) were in love with me, should I not be very happy?" My friend with much address evaded my interrogatories, and kept me as quiet as possible ; but it may easily be conceived how he must have felt. However, when a few days afterwards I waited upon him and made an apology, he behaved with the most friendly gentleness. —*The Life*. 1781, May.

“ You are entering upon a transaction which requires much prudence. You must endeavour to oppose without exasperating ; to practise temporary hostility, without producing enemies for life. This is, perhaps, hard to be done ; yet it has been done by many, and seems most likely to be effected by opposing merely upon general principles, without descending to personal or particular censures or objections. One thing I must enjoin you, which is seldom observed in the conduct of elections ;—I must entreat you to be scrupulous in the use of strong liquors. One night’s drunkenness may defeat the labours of forty days well employed. Be firm, but not clamorous ; be active, but not malicious ; and you may form such an interest, as may not only exalt yourself, but dignify your family.”

—*The Life*. 1784, March 30th.

The Art of Conversation

JOHNSON'S PRECEPT

It has been circulated, I know not with what authenticity, that Johnson considered Dr. Birch as a dull writer, and said of him, "Tom Birch is as brisk as a bee in conversation, but no sooner does he take a pen in his hand, than it becomes a torpedo to him, and benumbs all his faculties." That the literature of this country is much indebted to Birch's activity and diligence must certainly be acknowledged. We have seen that Johnson honoured him with a Greek Epigram; and his correspondence with him, during many years, proves that he had no mean opinion of him. —*The Life.* 1743.

He laughed heartily when I mentioned to him a saying of his concerning Mr. Thomas Sheridan, which Foote took a wicked pleasure to circulate. "Why, Sir, Sherry is dull, naturally dull; but it must have taken him a great deal of pains to become what we now see him. Such an excess of stupidity, Sir, is not in Nature."—"So," said he, "I allowed him all his own merit." —*The Life.* 1763, Feb. 28th.

Talking of Garrick, he said, "He is the first man in the world for sprightly conversation."

—*The Life*. 1763, May 24th.

A writer of deserved eminence being mentioned, Johnson said, "Why, Sir, he is a man of good parts, but being originally poor, he has got a love of mean company and low jocularities; a very bad thing, Sir. To laugh is good, and to talk is good. But you ought no more to think it enough if you laugh, than you are to think it enough if you talk. You may laugh in as many ways as you talk; and surely *every* way of talking that is practised cannot be esteemed." —*The Life*. 1763, July 21st.

Of a certain player, he remarked, that his conversation usually threatened and announced more than it performed; that he fed you with a continual renovation of hope, to end in a constant succession of disappointment.

—*The Life*. 1770. Dr. Maxwell's *Collectanea*.

Of our friend Goldsmith he said, "Sir, he is so much afraid of being unnoticed, that he often talks merely lest you should forget that he is in the company." BOSWELL: "Yes, he stands forward". JOHNSON: "True, Sir; but if a man is to stand forward, he should wish to do it not in an awkward posture, not in rags, not so as that he shall only be exposed to ridicule". BOSWELL: "For my part, I like very well to hear honest Goldsmith talk away carelessly".

JOHNSON: "Why, yes, Sir, but he should not like to hear himself".

—*The Life*. 1772, April 11th.

"The misfortune of Goldsmith in conversation is this: he goes on without knowing how he is to get off. His genius is great, but his knowledge is small. As they say of a generous man, it is a pity he is not rich, we may say of Goldsmith, it is a pity he is not knowing. He would not keep his knowledge to himself." —*The Life*. 1772, May 9th.

Lord Chesterfield being mentioned, Johnson remarked, that almost all of that celebrated nobleman's witty sayings were puns. He, however, allowed the merit of good wit to his Lordship's saying of Lord Tyrawley and himself, when both very old and infirm: "Tyrawley and I have been dead these two years; but we don't choose to have it known."

—*The Life*. 1773, April 3rd.

✓ He said: "Goldsmith should not be for ever attempting to shine in conversation: he has not temper for it, he is so much mortified when he fails. Sir, a game of jokes is composed partly of skill, partly of chance, a man may be beat at times by one who has not the tenth part of his wit. Now Goldsmith's putting himself against another, is like a man laying a hundred to one who cannot spare the hundred. It is not worth a man's while. A man should not lay a hundred to one, unless

he can easily spare it, though he has a hundred chances for him : he can get but a guinea, and he may lose a hundred. Goldsmith is in this state. When he contends, if he gets the better, it is a very little addition to a man of his literary reputation : if he does not get the better, he is miserably vexed."

Johnson's own superlative powers of wit set him above any risk of such uneasiness. Garrick had remarked to me of him, a few days before, "Rabelais and all other wits are nothing compared with him. You may be diverted by them ; but Johnson gives you a forcible hug, and shakes laughter out of you whether you will or no."

Goldsmith, however, was often very fortunate in his witty contests, even when he entered the lists with Johnson himself. Sir Joshua Reynolds was in company with them one day, when Goldsmith said, that he thought he could write a good fable, mentioned the simplicity which that kind of composition requires, and observed, that in most fables the animals introduced seldom talk in character. "For instance," said he, "the fable of the little fishes, who saw birds fly over their heads, and envying them, petitioned Jupiter to be changed into birds. The skill," continued he, "consists in making them talk like little fishes." While he indulged himself in this fanciful reverie, he observed Johnson shaking his sides, and laughing. Upon which he smartly proceeded, "Why, Dr. Johnson, this is not so easy as you seem to think ; for if you were to

make little fishes talk, they would talk like WHALES.” —*The Life.* 1773, April 27th.

Goldsmith being mentioned, JOHNSON: “It is amazing how little Goldsmith knows. He seldom comes where he is not more ignorant than anyone else.” SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS: “Yet there is no man whose company is more liked”. JOHNSON: “To be sure, Sir. When people find a man of the most distinguished abilities as a writer their inferior while he is with them, it must be highly gratifying to them. What Goldsmith comically says of himself is very true—he always gets the better when he argues alone; meaning, that he is master of a subject in his study, and can write well upon it; but when he comes into company, grows confused, and unable to talk. Take him as a poet, his *Traveller* is a very fine performance; aye, and so is his *Deserted Village*, were it not sometimes too much the echo of his *Traveller*. Whether, indeed, we take him as a poet, as a comic writer, or as an historian, he stands in the first class.”

—*The Life.* 1773, April 30th.

In our way to the Club to-night, when I regretted that Goldsmith would, upon every occasion, endeavour to shine, by which he often exposed himself, Mr. Langton observed, that he was not like Addison, who was content with the fame of his writings, and did not aim also at excellency in conversation, for which he found himself unfit; and that he said to a lady

who complained of his having talked little in company, "Madam, I have but ninepence in ready money, but I can draw for a thousand pounds." I observed that Goldsmith had a great deal of gold in his cabinet, but not content with that, was always taking out his purse. JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, and that so often an empty purse!"

Goldsmith's incessant desire of being conspicuous in company, was the occasion of his sometimes appearing to such disadvantage as one should hardly have supposed possible in a man of his genius. When his literary reputation had risen deservedly high, and his society was much courted, he became very jealous of the extraordinary attention which was everywhere paid to Johnson. One evening, in a circle of wits, he found fault with me for talking of Johnson as entitled to the honour of unquestionable superiority. "Sir," said he, "you are for making a monarchy of what should be a republic."

He was still more mortified, when, talking in a company with fluent vivacity, and, as he flattered himself, to the admiration of all who were present, a German, who sat next him, and perceived Johnson rolling himself, as if about to speak, suddenly stopped him, saying, "Stay, stay—Toctor Shonson is going to say something." This was, no doubt, very provoking, especially to one so irritable as Goldsmith, who frequently mentioned it with strong expressions of indignation.

It may also be observed, that Goldsmith was

sometimes content to be treated with an easy familiarity, but upon occasions would be consequential and important. An instance of this occurred in a small particular. Johnson had a way of contracting the names of his friends: as Beauclerk, Beau; Boswell, Bozzy; Langton, Lanky; Murphy, Mur; Sheridan, Sherry. I remember one day, when Tom Davies was telling that Dr. Johnson said, "We are all in labour for a name to *Goldy's* play," Goldsmith seemed displeased that such a liberty should be taken with his name and said, "I have often desired him not to call me *Goldy*." Tom was remarkably attentive to the most minute circumstances about Johnson. I recollect his telling me once, on my arrival in London, "Sir, our great friend has made an improvement on his appellation of old Mr. Sheridan. He calls him now *Sherry derry*."—*The Life*. 1773, May 7th.

We talked of Mr. Burke.—Dr. Johnson said, he had great variety of knowledge, store of imagery, copiousness of language. ROBERTSON: "He has wit too". JOHNSON: "No, Sir, he never succeeds there. 'Tis low; 'tis conceit. I used to say, Burke never once made a good joke. What I most envy Burke for is, his being constantly the same. He is never what we call humdrum; never unwilling to begin to talk, nor in haste to leave off." BOSWELL: "Yet he can listen". JOHNSON: "No; I cannot say he is good at that. So desirous is he to talk, that, if one is speaking at this end of the table, he'll speak to somebody at the

other end. Burke, Sir, is such a man, that if you met him for the first time in the street where you were stopped by a drove of oxen, and you and he stepped aside to take shelter but for five minutes, he'd talk to you in such a manner, that, when you parted, you would say, this is an extraordinary man. Now, you may be long enough with me, without finding anything extraordinary."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 15th.

He had last night looked into Lord Hailes's *Remarks on the History of Scotland*. Dr. Robertson and I said, it was a pity Lord Hailes did not write greater things. His lordship had not then published his *Annals of Scotland*.—JOHNSON: "I remember I was once on a visit at the house of a lady for whom I had a high respect. There was a good deal of company in the room. When they were gone, I said to this lady, 'What foolish talking have we had!'—'Yes,' said she, 'but while they talked, you said nothing.'—I was struck with the reproof. How much better is the man who does anything that is innocent, than he who does nothing. Besides, I love anecdotes. I fancy mankind may come, in time, to write all aphoristically, except in narrative; grow weary of preparation, and connection, and illustration, and all those arts by which a big book is made.—If a man is to wait till he weaves anecdotes into a system, we may be long in getting them, and get but few, in comparison of what we might get."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 16th.

BOSWELL: "It is a shame that authors are not now better patronized". JOHNSON: "No, Sir. If learning cannot support a man, if he must sit with his hands across till somebody feeds him, it is as to him a bad thing and it is better as it is. With patronage, what flattery! what falsehood! While a man is in equilibrio, he throws truth among the multitude, and lets them take it as they please: in patronage, he must say what pleases his patron, and it is an equal chance whether that be truth or falsehood." WATSON: "But is not the case now, that, instead of flattering one person, we flatter the age?" JOHNSON: "No, Sir. The world always lets a man tell what he thinks, his own way. I wonder, however, that so many people have written, who might have let it alone. That people should endeavour to excel in conversation, I do not wonder; because in conversation praise is instantly reverberated."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 19th.

We drove over a wild moor. It rained, and the scene was somewhat dreary. Dr. Johnson repeated, with solemn emphasis, Macbeth's speech on meeting the witches. As we travelled on, he told me, "Sir, you got into our club by doing what a man can do. Several of the members wished to keep you out. Burke told me, he doubted if you were fit for it: but, now you are in, none of them are sorry. Burke says, that you have so much good humour naturally, it is scarce a virtue." BOSWELL: "They were afraid of you, Sir, as it

was you who proposed me". JOHNSON: "Sir, they knew, that if they refused you, they'd probably never have got in another. I'd have kept them all out. Beauclerk was very earnest for you." BOSWELL: "Beauclerk has a keenness of mind which is very uncommon". JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir; and everything comes from him so easily. It appears to me that I labour when I say a good thing." BOSWELL: "You are loud, Sir; but it is not an effort of mind". —*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 21st.

We visited two booksellers' shops, and could not find Arthur Johnston's Poems. We went and sat near an hour at Mr. Riddoch's. He could not tell distinctly how much education at the college here costs, which disgusted Dr. Johnson. I had pledged myself that we should go to the inn, and not stay supper. They pressed us, but he was resolute. I saw Mr. Riddoch did not please him. He said to me, afterwards, "Sir, he has no vigour in his talk." But my friend should have considered that he himself was not in good humour; so that it was not easy to talk to his satisfaction. We sat contentedly at our inn. He then became merry, and observed how little we had either heard or said at Aberdeen: that the Aberdonians had not started a single *maxkin* (the Scottish word for hare) for us to pursue.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 23rd.

In a short Account of the Kirk of Scotland, which I published some years ago, I applied

these words "*penes illum gloria, penes hunc palma*" to the two contending parties, and explained them thus: "The popular party has most eloquence; Dr. Robertson's party most influence". I was very desirous to hear Dr. Johnson's explication. JOHNSON: "I see no difficulty. Gilmour was admired for his parts; Nisbet carried his cause by his skill in law. *Palma* is victory." I observed, that the character of Nicholson, in this book resembled that of Burke: for it is said, in one place, "*in omnes lusus & jocos se sæpe resolvebat*"; and, in another, "*sed accipitris more e conspectu aliquando astantium sublimi se protrahens volatu, in prædam miro impetu descendebat*". JOHNSON: "No, Sir; I never heard Burke make a good joke in my life". BOSWELL: "But, Sir, you will allow he is a hawk". Dr. Johnson, thinking that I meant this of his joking, said, "No, Sir, he is not a hawk there. He is the beetle in the mire." I still adhered to my metaphor,—"But he *soars* as the hawk." JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir; but he catches nothing". M'Leod asked, what is the particular excellence of Burke's eloquence? JOHNSON: "Copiousness and fertility of allusion; a power of diversifying his matter, by placing it in various relations. Burke has great information, and great command of language; though, in my opinion, it has not in every respect the highest elegance." BOSWELL: "Do you think, Sir, that Burke has read Cicero much?" JOHNSON: "I don't believe it, Sir. Burke has great knowledge, great fluency of words, and great prompt-

ness of ideas, so that he can speak with great illustration on any subject that comes before him. He is neither like Cicero nor like Demosthenes, nor like anyone else, but speaks as well as he can."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 15th.

He said, he was angry at Thrale, for sitting at General Oglethorpe's without speaking. He censured a man for degrading himself to a nonentity. I observed, that Goldsmith was on the other extreme; for he spoke at all ventures. JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir; Goldsmith, rather than not speak, will talk of what he knows himself to be ignorant, which can only end in exposing him". "I wonder," said I, "if he feels that he exposes himself. If he was with two tailors—" "Or with two founders," said Dr. Johnson, interrupting me, "he would fall a-talking on the method of making cannon, though both of them would soon see that he did not know what metal a cannon is made of."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Oct. 2nd.

I was quite easy with Sir Allan almost instantaneously. He knew the great intimacy that had been between my father and his predecessor, Sir Hector, and was himself of a very frank disposition. After dinner, Sir Allan said he had got Dr. Campbell about an hundred subscribers to his *Britannia Elucidata* (a work since published under the title of *A Political Survey of Great Britain*) of whom he believed twenty were dead, the publication having been

so long delayed. JOHNSON: "Sir, I imagine the delay of publication is owing to this;—that, after publication, there will be no more subscribers, and few will send the additional guinea to get their books: in which they will be wrong; for there will be a great deal of instruction in the work. I think highly of Campbell. In the first place, he has very good parts. In the second place, he has very extensive reading; not, perhaps, what is properly called learning, but history, politics, and, in short, that popular knowledge which makes a man very useful. In the third place, he has learned much by what is called the *vox viva*. He talks with a great many people."

Speaking of this gentleman, at Rasay, he told us, that he one day called on him, and they talked of Tull's *Husbandry*. Dr. Campbell said something. Dr. Johnson began to dispute it. "Come," said Dr. Campbell, "we do not want to get the better of one another: we want to increase each other's ideas." Dr. Johnson took it in good part, and the conversation then went on coolly and instructively. His candour in relating this anecdote does him much credit, and his conduct on that occasion proves how easily he could be persuaded to talk from a better motive than "for victory". —*The Tour*. 1773, Oct. 17th.

Young Col told us he could run down a greyhound; "for," said he, "the dog runs himself out of breath by going too quick, and then I get up with him." I accounted for his

advantage over the dog, by remarking that Col had the faculty of reason, and knew how to moderate his pace, which the dog had not sense enough to do. Dr. Johnson said, "He is a noble animal. He is as complete an islander as the mind can figure. He is a farmer, a sailor, a hunter, a fisher: he will run you down a dog: if any man has a *tail*, it is Col. He is hospitable; and he has an intrepidity of talk, whether he understands the subject or not. I regret that he is not more intellectual." —*The Tour*. 1773, Oct. 18th.

In a magazine I found a saying of Dr. Johnson's, something to this purpose; that the happiest part of a man's life is what he passes lying awake in bed in the morning. I read it to him. He said, "I may, perhaps, have said this; for nobody, at times, talks more laxly than I do." I ventured to suggest to him, that this was dangerous from one of his authority.

—*The Tour*. 1773, Oct. 24th.

He this day, when we were by ourselves, observed, how common it was for people to talk from books; to retail the sentiments of others, and not their own: in short, to converse without any originality of thinking. He was pleased to say, "You and I do not talk from books". —*The Tour*. 1773, Nov. 3rd.

He was pleased to say, "If you come to settle here, we will have one day in the week

on which we will meet by ourselves. That is the happiest conversation where there is no competition, no vanity, but a calm, quiet interchange of sentiment."

—*The Life*. 1775, April 14th.

I expressed a desire to be acquainted with a lady who had been much talked of, and universally celebrated for extraordinary address and insinuation. JOHNSON: "Never believe extraordinary characters which you hear of people. Depend upon it, Sir, they are exaggerated. You do not see one man shoot a great deal higher than another." I mentioned Mr. Burke. JOHNSON: "Yes, Burke *is* an extraordinary man. His stream of mind is perpetual." It is very pleasing to me to record, that Johnson's high estimation of the talents of this gentleman was uniform, from their early acquaintance. Sir Joshua Reynolds informs me, that when Mr. Burke was first elected a member of Parliament, and Sir J. Hawkins expressed a wonder at his attaining a seat, Johnson said: "Now, we who know Mr. Burke, know that he will be one of the first men in the country." And once when Johnson was ill, and unable to exert himself as much as usual without fatigue, Mr. Burke having been mentioned, he said, "That fellow calls forth all my powers. Were I to see Burke now it would kill me." So much was he accustomed to consider conversation as a contest, and such was his notion of Burke as an opponent. —*The Life*. 1776, March 20th.

Dr. Adams told us, that in some of the colleges at Oxford, the fellows had excluded the students from social intercourse with them in the common room. JOHNSON: "They are in the right, Sir; there can be no real conversation, no fair exertion of mind amongst them, if the young men are by: for a man who has a character does not choose to stake it in their presence". BOSWELL: "But, Sir, may there not be very good conversation without a contest for superiority?" JOHNSON: "No animated conversation, Sir; for it cannot be but one or other will come off superior. I do not mean that the victor must have the better of the argument, for he may take the weak side; but his superiority of parts and knowledge will necessarily appear; and he to whom he thus shows himself superior is lessened in the eyes of the young men. You know it was said, '*Mallem cum Scaligero errare quam cum Clavio recte sapere*'. In the same manner take Bentley's and Jason de Nore's Comments upon Horace, you will admire Bentley more when wrong, than Jason when right."

—*The Life*. 1776, March 20th.

"Goldsmith", he said, "referred everything to vanity; his virtues and his vices too were from that motive. He was not a social man: he never exchanged mind with you."

—*The Life*. 1776, April 11th.

The uncommon vivacity of General Oglethorpe's mind, and variety of knowledge, hav-

ing sometimes made his conversation seem too desultory, Johnson observed, "Oglethorpe, Sir, never *completes* what he has to say."

He on the same account made a similar remark on Patrick Lord Elibank: "Sir, there is nothing *conclusive* in his talk."

When I complained of having dined at a splendid table without hearing one sentence of conversation worthy of being remembered, he said, "Sir, there seldom is any such conversation." BOSWELL: "Why then meet at table?" JOHNSON: "Why, to eat and drink together, and to promote kindness; and, Sir, this is better done where there is no solid conversation; for when there is, people differ in opinion, and get into bad humour, or some of the company, who are not capable of such conversation, are left out, and feel themselves uneasy. It was for this reason, Sir Robert Walpole said, he always talked bawdy at his table, because in that all could join."

Being irritated by hearing a gentleman ask Mr. Levett a variety of questions concerning him when he was sitting by, he broke out, "Sir, you have but two topics, yourself and me. I am sick of both. A man," said he, "should not talk of himself, nor much of any particular person. He should take care not to be made a proverb; and therefore should avoid having any one topic of which people can say, 'We shall hear him upon it'. There was a Dr. Oldfield, who was always talking of the Duke of Marlborough. He came into a coffee-house one day, and told that his Grace had

spoken in the House of Lords for half an hour. 'Did he indeed speak for half an hour?' said Belchier, the surgeon.—'Yes.'—'And what did he say of Dr. Oldfield?'—'Nothing.'—'Why, then, Sir, he was very ungrateful; for Dr. Oldfield could not have spoken for a quarter of an hour, without saying something of him.'"

—*The Life.* 1776, May.

Johnson gave us this evening, in his happy discriminative manner, a portrait of the late Mr. Fitzherbert of Derbyshire. "There was," said he, "no sparkle, no brilliancy in Fitzherbert; but I never knew a man who was so generally acceptable. He made everybody quite easy, overpowered nobody by the superiority of his talents, made no man think worse of himself by being his rival, seemed always to listen, did not oblige you to hear much from him, and did not oppose what you said. Everybody liked him; but he had no friend, as I understand the word, nobody with whom he exchanged intimate thoughts. People were willing to think well of everything about him. He was an instance of the truth of the observation, that a man will please more upon the whole by negative qualities than by positive; by never offending, than by giving a great deal of delight. In the first place, men hate more steadily than they love; and if I have said something to hurt a man once, I shall not get the better of this, by saying many things to please him." —*The Life.* 1777, Sept. 15th.

In the evening the Reverend Mr. Seward, of Lichfield, who was passing through Ashbourne, in his way home, drank tea with us. Johnson described him thus:—"Sir, his ambition is to be a fine talker; so he goes to Buxton, and such places, where he may find companies to listen to him. And, Sir, he is a valetudinarian,—one of those who are always mending themselves. I do not know a more disagreeable character than a valetudinarian, who thinks he may do anything that is for his ease, and indulges himself in the grossest freedoms. Sir, he brings himself to the state of a hog in a sty."

—*The Life* 1777, Sept. 16th.

Johnson and Taylor were so different from each other, that I wondered at their preserving an intimacy. Their having been at school and college together, might, in some degree, account for this; but Sir Joshua Reynolds has furnished me with a stronger reason; for Johnson mentioned to him that he had been told by Taylor he was to be his heir. I shall not take upon me to animadvert upon this; but certain it is that Johnson paid great attention to Taylor. He now, however, said to me, "Sir, I love him; but I do not love him more; my regard for him does not increase. As it is said in the Apocrypha, 'his talk is of bullocks'. I do not suppose he is very fond of my company. His habits are by no means sufficiently clerical; this he knows that I see; and no man likes to live under the eye of perpetual disapprobation." —*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 21st.

“Did we not hear so much said of Jack Wilkes, we should think more highly of his conversation. Jack has a great variety of talk: Jack is a scholar, and Jack has the manners of a gentleman. But after hearing his name sounded from pole to pole, as the phoenix of convivial felicity, we are disappointed in his company. He has always been *at me*: but I would do Jack a kindness, rather than not. The contest is now over.”

“Garriek’s gaiety of conversation has delicacy and elegance: Foote makes you laugh more; but Foote has the air of a buffoon paid for entertaining the company. He, indeed, well deserves his hire.”

—*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 21st

He said, “John Wesley’s conversation is good, but he is never at leisure. He is always obliged to go at a certain hour. This is very disagreeable to a man who loves to fold his legs and have out his talk, as I do.”

—*The Life*. 1778, March 31st.

Of Goldsmith, he said, “He was not an agreeable companion, for he talked always for fame. A man who does so never can be pleasing. The man who talks to unburden his mind is the man to delight you. An eminent friend of ours is not so agreeable as the variety of his knowledge would otherwise make him, because he talks partly from ostentation.”

—*The Life*. 1778, April 7th.

Goldsmith being mentioned, Johnson ob-

served that it was long before his merit came to be acknowledged: that he once complained to him, in ludicrous terms of distress, "Whenever I write anything, the public *make a point* to know nothing about it": but that his *Traveller* brought him into high reputation. LANGTON: "There is not one bad line in that poem—no one of Dryden's careless verses". SIR JOSHUA: "I was glad to hear Charles Fox say, it was one of the finest poems in the English language". LANGTON: "Why were you glad? You surely had no doubt of this before." JOHNSON: "No; the merit of *The Traveller* is so well established, that Mr. Fox's praise cannot augment it, nor his censure diminish it". SIR JOSHUA: "But his friends may suspect they had too great a partiality for him". JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir, the partiality of his friends was always against him. It was with difficulty we could give him a hearing. Goldsmith had no settled notions upon any subject; so he talked always at random. It seemed to be his intention to blurt out whatever was in his mind, and see what would become of it. He was angry too, when caught in an absurdity; but it did not prevent him from falling into another the next minute. I remember Chamier, after talking with him some time, said, 'Well, I do believe he wrote this poem himself: and, let me tell you, that is believing a great deal.' Chamier once asked him, what he meant by *slow*, the last word in the first line of *The Traveller*,

• Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow.'

Did he mean tardiness of locomotion? Goldsmith, who would say something without consideration, answered, 'Yes.' I was sitting by, and said, 'No, Sir; you do not mean tardiness of locomotion; you mean that sluggishness of mind which comes upon a man in solitude.' Chamier believed then that I had written the line, as much as if he had seen me write it. Goldsmith, however, was a man who, whatever he wrote, did it better than any other man could do. He deserved a place in Westminster Abbey; and every year he lived, would have deserved it better. He had indeed been at no pains to fill his mind with knowledge. He transplanted it from one place to another; and it did not settle in his mind; so he could not tell what was in his own books."

—*The Life.* 1778, April 9th.

He found fault with our friend Langton for having been too silent. "Sir," said I, "you will recollect that he very properly took up Sir Joshua for being glad that Charles Fox had praised Goldsmith's *Traveller*, and you joined him." JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, I knocked Fox on the head, without ceremony. Reynolds is too much under Fox and Burke at present. He is under the *Fox star*, and the *Irish constellation*. He is always under some planet." BOSWELL: "'There is no Fox star'". JOHNSON: "But there is a Dog star". BOSWELL: "They say, indeed, a fox and a dog are the same animal".

I reminded him of a gentleman, who, Mrs. Cholmondeley said, was first talkative from

affectation, and then silent from the same cause; that he first thought, "I shall be celebrated as the liveliest man in every company;" and then, all at once, "Oh! it is much more respectable to be grave and look wise." "He has reversed the Pythagorean discipline, by being first talkative, and then silent. He reverses the course of nature too; he was first the gay butterfly, and then the creeping worm." Johnson laughed loud and long at this expansion and illustration of what he himself had told me.

—*The Life.* 1778, April 10th.

He talked of Mr. Charles Fox, of whose abilities he thought highly, but observed, that he did not talk much at our CLUB. I have heard Mr. Gibbon remark, "that Mr. Fox could not be afraid of Dr. Johnson; yet he certainly was very shy of saying anything in Dr. Johnson's presence". Mr. Scott now quoted what was said of Alcibiades by a Greek poet, to which Johnson assented.

—*The Life.* 1778, April 10th.

Of John Wesley, he said, "He can talk well on any subject."

—*The Life.* 1778, April 15th.

This interview confirmed my opinion of Johnson's most humane and benevolent heart. His cordial and placid behaviour to an old fellow-collegian, a man so different from himself, and his telling him that he would go down to his farm and visit him, showed a kindness of

disposition very rare at an advanced age. He observed, "How wonderful it was that they had both been in London forty years, without having ever once met, and both walkers in the street too!" Mr. Edwards, when going away, again recurred to his consciousness of senility, and looking full in Johnson's face, said to him, "You'll find in Dr. Young

'O my coevals! remnants of yourselves'."

Johnson did not relish this at all; but shook his head with impatience. Edwards walked off seemingly highly pleased with the honour of having been thus noticed by Dr. Johnson. When he was gone I said to Johnson, I thought him but a weak man. JOHNSON: "Why, yes, Sir. Here is a man who has passed through life without experience: yet I would rather have him with me than a more sensible man who will not talk readily. This man is always willing to say what he has to say." Yet Dr. Johnson had himself by no means that willingness which he praised so much, and I think so justly; for who has not felt the painful effect of the dreary void, when there is a total silence in the company, for any length of time; or, which is as bad, or perhaps worse, when the conversation is with difficulty kept up by a perpetual effort?

Johnson once observed to me, "Tom Tyers described me the best: 'Sir,' said he, 'you are like a ghost: you never speak till you are spoken to.'"

—*The Life*. 1778, April 17th.

He proceeded:—"Demosthenes Taylor, as he was called (that is, the editor of *Demosthenes*), was the most silent man, the merest statue of a man that I had ever seen. I once dined in company with him, and all he said during the whole time was no more than *Richard*. How a man should say only Richard, it is not easy to imagine. But it was thus: Dr. Douglas was talking of Dr. Zachary Grey, and was ascribing to him something that was written by Dr. Richard Grey. So, to correct him, Taylor said (imitating his affected sententious emphasis and nod), '*Richard*'." —*The Life*. 1778, April 25th.

The conversation having turned on *Bon-mots*, he quoted, from one of the *Ana*, an exquisite instance of flattery in a maid of honour in France, who being asked by the Queen what o'clock it was, answered, "What your Majesty pleases." He admitted that Mr. Burke's classical pun upon Mr. Wilkes's being carried on the shoulders of the mob

"———numerisque fertur
Lege solutus,"

was admirable; and though he was strangely unwilling to allow to that extraordinary man the talent of wit, he also laughed with approbation at another of his playful conceits; which was, that "Horace has in one line given a description of a good desirable manor:

'Est modus in rebus, sunt certi denique fines';

that is to say, a *modus* as to the tithes, and certain *fnēs*.” —*The Life*. 1778, April 25th.

He observed, “A man cannot with propriety speak of himself, except he relates simple facts as, ‘I was at Richmond;’ or what depends on mensuration, as, ‘I am six feet high.’ He is sure he has been at Richmond; he is sure he is six feet high; but he cannot be sure he is wise, or that he has any other excellence. Then, all censure of a man’s self is oblique praise. It is in order to show how much he can spare. It has all the invidiousness of self-praise, and all the reproach of falsehood.” BOSWELL: “Sometimes it may proceed from a man’s strong consciousness of his faults being observed. He knows that others would throw him down, and therefore he had better lie down softly of his own accord.” —*The Life*. 1778, April 25th.

Dr. Robertson expatiated on the character of a certain nobleman; that he was one of the strongest-minded men that ever lived; that he would sit in company quite sluggish, while there was nothing to call forth his intellectual vigour; but the moment that any important subject was started—for instance, how this country is to be defended against a French invasion—he would rouse himself, and show his extraordinary talents with the most powerful ability and animation. JOHNSON: “Yet this man cut his own throat. The true strong and sound mind is the mind that can embrace equally great things and small. Now, I am

told the King of Prussia will say to a servant, 'Bring me a bottle of such a wine, which came in such a year; it lies in such a corner of the cellars'. I would have a man great in great things and elegant in little things." He said to me afterwards, when we were by ourselves, "Robertson was in a mighty romantic humour; he talked of one whom he did not know; but I *downed* him with the King of Prussia." "Yes, Sir," said I, "you threw a *bottle* at his head."

—*The Life*. 1778, April 29th.

Next day, Thursday, April 30th, I found him at home by himself. JOHNSON: "Well, Sir, Ramsay gave us a splendid dinner. I love Ramsay. You will not find a man in whose conversation there is more instruction, more information, and more elegance, than in Ramsay's." BOSWELL: "What I admire in Ramsay, is his continuing to be so young". JOHNSON: "Why, yes, Sir, it is to be admired. I value myself upon this, that there is nothing of the old man in my conversation. I am now sixty-eight, and I have no more of it than at twenty-eight." BOSWELL: "But, Sir, would you not wish to know old age? He who is never an old man, does not know the whole of human life; for old age is one of the divisions of it." JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir, what talk is this?" BOSWELL: "I mean, Sir, the Sphinx's description of it—morning, noon, and night. I would know night, as well as morning and noon." JOHNSON: "What, Sir, would you know what it is to feel the evils of old age? Would you

have the gout? Would you have decrepitude?" Seeing him heated, I would not argue farther; but I was confident that I was in the right. I would, in due time, be a Nestor, an elder of the people; and there *should* be some difference between the conversation of twenty-eight and sixty-eight. A grave picture should not be gay. There is a serene, solemn, placid old age. JOHNSON: "Mrs. Thrale's mother said of me what flattered me much. A clergyman was complaining of want of society in the country where he lived, and said, 'They talk of *runts*;' that is, young cows. 'Sir,' said Mrs. Salusbury, 'Mr. Johnson would learn to talk of runts,' meaning that I was a man who would make the most of my situation, whatever it was." He added, "I think myself a very polite man." —*The Life*. 1778, April 30th.

On Saturday, May 2, I dined with him at Sir Joshua Reynolds's, where there was a very large company, and a great deal of conversation; but owing to some circumstances which I cannot now recollect, I have no record of any part of it, except that there were several people there by no means of the Johnsonian school; so that less attention was paid to him than usual, which put him out of humour; and upon some imaginary offence from me, he attacked me with such rudeness, that I was vexed and angry, because it gave those persons an opportunity of enlarging upon his supposed ferocity, and ill-treatment of his best friends. I was so much hurt, and had my pride so much roused, that I kept away

from him for a week; and, perhaps, might have kept away much longer, nay, gone to Scotland without seeing him again, had not we fortunately met and been reconciled. To such unhappy chances are human friendships liable!

On Friday, May 8th, I dined with him at Mr. Langton's. I was reserved and silent, which I supposed he perceived, and might recollect the cause. After dinner, when Mr. Langton was called out of the room, and we were by ourselves, he drew his chair near to mine, and said, in a tone of conciliating courtesy, "Well, how have you done?" BOSWELL: "Sir, you have made me very uneasy by your behaviour to me when we were last at Sir Joshua Reynolds's. You know, my dear Sir, no man has a greater respect and affection for you, or would sooner go to the end of the world to serve you. Now, to treat me so—" He insisted that I had interrupted him, which I assured him was not the case; and proceeded, "But why treat me so before people who neither love you nor me?" JOHNSON: "Well, I am sorry for it. I'll make it up to you twenty different ways, as you please." BOSWELL: "I said to-day to Sir Joshua, when he observed that you *tossed* me sometimes, I don't care how often, or how high he tosses me, when only friends are present, for then I fall upon soft ground; but I do not like falling on stones, which is the case when enemies are present. I think this is a pretty good image, Sir." JOHN-SON: "Sir, it is one of the happiest I ever have heard."

The truth is, there was no venom in the wounds which he inflicted at any time, unless they were irritated by some malignant infusion by other hands. We were instantly as cordial again as ever, and joined in hearty laugh at some ludicrous but innocent peculiarities of one of our friends. BOSWELL: "Do you think, Sir, it is always culpable to laugh at a man to his face?" JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, that depends upon the man and the thing. If it is a slight man, and a slight thing, you may; for you take nothing valuable from him."

When Mr. Langton returned to us, the "flow of talk" went on. An eminent author being mentioned:—JOHNSON: "He is not a pleasant man. His conversation is neither instructive nor brilliant. He does not talk as if impelled by any fulness of knowledge or vivacity of imagination. His conversation is like that of any other sensible man. He talks with no wish either to inform or to hear, but only because he thinks it does not become —— to sit in a company and say nothing."

Mr. Langton having repeated the anecdote of Addison having distinguished between his powers in conversation and in writing, by saying, "I have only ninepence in my pocket; but I can draw for a thousand pounds:"—JOHNSON: "He had not that retort ready, Sir; he had prepared it beforehand". LANGTON (turning to me): "A fine surmise. Set a thief to catch a thief."

—*The Life*. 1778, May 2nd, and May 8th.

“To be contradicted in order to force you to talk is mighty unpleasing. You *shine*, indeed; but it is by being *ground*.”

—*The Li'té*. 1779, April 16th.

A celebrated wit being mentioned, he said, “One may say of him as was said of a French wit, *Il n'a de l'esprit que contre Dieu*. I have been several times in company with him, but never perceived any strong power of wit. He produces a general effect by various means; he has a cheerful countenance and a gay voice. Besides, his trade is wit. It would be as wild in him to come into company without merri-ment, as for a highwayman to take the road without his pistols.”

Talking of celebrated and successful irregular practisers in physic, he said, “Taylor was the most ignorant man I ever knew, but sprightly: Ward, the dullest. Taylor challenged me once to talk Latin with him (laughing). I quoted some of Horace, which he took to be part of my own speech. He said a few words well enough.” BEAUMONT: “I remember, Sir, you said, that Taylor was an instance how far impudence could carry ignorance”. Mr. Beau-clerk was very entertaining this day, and told us a number of short stories in a lively and elegant manner, and with that air of *the world* which has I know not what impressive effect, as if there were something more than is expressed, or than, perhaps, we could perfectly understand. As Johnson and I accompanied Sir Joshua Reynolds in his coach, Johnson said, “There is in

Beauclerk a predominance over his company that one does not like. But he is a man who has lived so much in the world, that he has a short story on every occasion; he is always ready to talk, and is never exhausted."

—*The Life*. 1779, April 24th.

Huggins, the translator of Ariosto, and Mr. Thomas Warton, in the early part of his literary life, had a dispute concerning that poet: of whom Mr. Warton, in his *Observations on Spenser's Fairy Queen*, gave some account which Huggins attempted to answer with violence, and said, "I will *militate* no longer against his *nescience*." Huggins was master of the subject, but wanted expression. Mr. Warton's knowledge of it was then imperfect, but his manner lively and elegant. Johnson said, "It appears to me, that Huggins has ball without powder, and Warton powder without ball."

—*The Life*. 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's *Johnsoniana*.

An eminent foreigner, when he was shown the British Museum, was very troublesome with many absurd enquiries. "Now there, Sir," said he, "is the difference between an Englishman and a Frenchman. A Frenchman must be always talking, whether he knows anything of the matter or not; an Englishman is content to say nothing, when he has nothing to say." His unjust contempt for foreigners was, indeed, extreme. One evening, at Old Slaughter's coffee-house, when a number of them were talking loud about little matters, he said, "Does

not this confirm old Meynell's observation—
For anything I see, foreigners are fools!"

He said, that once, when he had a violent toothache, a Frenchman accosted him thus:
"*Ah, Monsieur, vous étudiez trop.*"

—*The Life.* 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's
Johnsoniana.

He used frequently to observe, that men might be very eminent in a profession, without our perceiving any particular power of mind in them in conversation. "It seems strange," said he, "that a man should see so far to the right, who sees so short a way to the left. Burke is the only man whose common conversation corresponds with the general fame which he has in the world. Take up whatever topic you please, he is ready to meet you."

—*The Life.* 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's
Johnsoniana.

A gentleman who introduced his brother to Dr. Johnson, was earnest to recommend him to the Doctor's notice, which he did by saying, "When we have sat together some time, you'll find my brother grow very entertaining."—"Sir," said Johnson, "I can wait."

—*The Life.* 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's
Johnsoniana.

As Johnson always allowed the extraordinary talents of Mr. Burke, so Mr. Burke was fully sensible of the wonderful powers of Johnson. Mr. Langton recollects having passed an evening with both of them, when Mr. Burke re-

peatedly entered upon topics which it was evident he would have illustrated with extensive knowledge and richness of expression; but Johnson always seized upon the conversation, in which, however, he acquitted himself in a most masterly manner. As Mr. Burke and Mr. Langton were walking home, Mr. Burke observed that Johnson had been very great that night. Mr. Langton joined in this, but added, he could have wished to hear more from another person, plainly intimating that he meant Mr. Burke. "Oh, no," said Mr. Burke, "it is enough for me to have rung the bell to him."

—*The Life.* 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's *Johnsoniana*.

The late Mr. Fitzherbert told Mr. Langton that Johnson said to him, "Sir, a man has no more right to *say* an uncivil thing, than to *act* one; no more right to say a rude thing to another than to knock him down."

—*The Life.* 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's *Johnsoniana*.

Of Dr. Goldsmith, he said, "No man was more foolish when he had not a pen in his hand, or more wise when he had."

Talking of Dr. Blagden's copiousness and precision of communication, Dr. Johnson said, "Blagden, Sir, is a delightful fellow."

—*The Life.* 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's *Johnsoniana*.

"The melancholy information you have re-

ceived concerning Mr. Beauclerk's death is true. Had his talents been directed in any sufficient degree as they ought, I have always been strongly of opinion that they were calculated to make an illustrious figure; and that opinion, as it had been in part formed upon Dr. Johnson's judgment, receives more and more confirmation by hearing what, since his death, Dr. Johnson has said concerning them: a few evenings ago, he was at Mr. Vesey's, where Lord Althorpe, who was one of a numerous company there, addressed Dr. Johnson on the subject of Mr. Beauclerk's death, saying, 'Our CLUB has had a great loss since we met last.' He replied, 'A loss, that perhaps the whole nation could not repair!' The Doctor then went on to speak of his endowments, and particularly extolled the wonderful ease with which he uttered what was highly excellent. He said, that 'no man ever was so free when he was going to say a good thing, from a *look* that expressed that it was coming; or, when he had said it, from a look that expressed that it had come'. At Mr. Thrale's, some days before, when we were talking on the same subject, he said, referring to the same idea of his wonderful facility, 'Topham Beauclerk's talents were those which he had felt himself more disposed to envy, than those of any whom he had known.' "

—*The Life*. 1780, May. Letter of Langton to Boswell.

Speaking of Pope's not having been known

to excel in conversation, Johnson observes, that "traditional memory retains no sallies of raillery, or sentences of observation; nothing either pointed or solid, wise or merry; and that one apophthegm only is recorded". In this respect, Pope differed widely from Johnson, whose conversation was, perhaps, more admirable than even his writings, however excellent. Mr. Wilkes has, however, favoured me with one repartee of Pope, of which Johnson was not informed. Johnson, after justly censuring him for having "nursed in his mind a foolish disesteem of kings", tells us, "yet a little regard shown him by the Prince of Wales melted his obduracy: and he had not much to say when he was asked by his Royal Highness, *how he could love a Prince while he disliked Kings?*" The answer which Pope made was, "The young lion is harmless, and even playful; but when his claws are full grown, he becomes cruel, dreadful, and mischievous."

But although we have no collection of Pope's sayings, it is not therefore to be concluded that he was not agreeable in social intercourse; for Johnson had been heard to say, that "the happiest conversation is that of which nothing is distinctly remembered, but a general effect of pleasing impression". The late Lord Somerville, who saw much of great and brilliant life, told me, that he had dined in company with Pope, and that after dinner the *little man*, as he called him, drank his bottle of Burgundy, and was exceedingly gay and entertaining.

—*The Life.* 1781.

I asked him, if he was not dissatisfied with having so small a share of wealth, and none of those distinctions in the state which are the objects of ambition. JOHNSON: "I never courted the great; they sent for me; but I think they now give me up. They are satisfied; they have seen enough of me." Upon my observing that I could not believe this, for they must certainly be highly pleased by his conversation; conscious of his own superiority, he answered, "No, Sir; great lords and great ladies don't love to have their mouths stopped." When I warmly declared how happy I was at all times to hear him;—"Yes, Sir," said he; "but if you were Lord Chancellor, it would not be so; you would then consider your own dignity." His noble friend, Lord Elibank, well observed, that if a great man procured an interview with Johnson, and did not wish to see him more, it showed a mere idle curiosity, and a wretched want of relish for extraordinary powers of mind. Mrs. Thrale justly and wittily accounted for such conduct by saying, that Johnson's conversation was by much too strong for a person accustomed to obsequiousness and flattery; it was *mustard in a young child's mouth*.

—*The Life.* 1781

Mrs. Thrale mentioned a gentleman who had acquired a fortune of £4000 a year in trade, but was absolutely miserable, because he could not talk in company; so miserable, that he was impelled to lament his situation in the

street to —, whom he hates, and who he knows despises him. “I am a most unhappy man,” said he. “I am invited to conversations. I go to conversations; but, alas! I have no conversation.” JOHNSON: “Man commonly cannot be successful in different ways. This gentleman has spent, in getting £4000 a year, the time in which he might have learnt to talk; and now he cannot talk.” Mr. Perkins made a shrewd and droll remark: “If he had got his £4000 a year as a mountebank, he might have learned to talk at the same time that he was getting his fortune.”

—*The Life*. 1781, April 1st.

Talking of conversation, he said, “There must, in the first place, be knowledge; there must be materials;—in the second place, there must be a command of words;—in the third place, there must be imagination, to place things in such views as they are not commonly seen in;—and in the fourth place, there must be presence of mind, and a resolution that it is not to be overcome by failures; this last is an essential requisite; for want of it many people do not excel in conversation. Now I want it; I throw up the game upon losing a trick.” I wondered to hear him talk thus of himself, and said, “I don’t know, Sir, how this may be; but I am sure you beat other people’s cards out of their hands.” I doubt whether he heard this remark. While he went on talking triumphantly, I was fixed in admiration, and said to Mrs. Thrale, “Oh, for shorthand to

take this down.”— “You’ll carry it all in your head,” said she; “a long head is as good as shorthand.”

It has been observed, and wondered at, that Mr. Charles Fox never talked with any freedom in the presence of Dr. Johnson; though it is well known, and I myself can witness, that his conversation is various, fluent, and exceedingly agreeable. Johnson’s own experience, however, of that gentleman’s reserve, was a sufficient reason for his going on thus:— “Fox never talks in private company; not from any determination not to talk, but because he has not the first motion. A man who is used to the applause of the House of Commons, has no wish for that of a private company. A man accustomed to throw for a thousand pounds, if set down to throw for sixpence, would not be at the pains to count his dice. Burke’s talk is the ebullition of his mind: he does not talk from a desire of distinction, but because his mind is full.”

He thus curiously characterized one of our old acquaintance:— “—— is a good man, Sir; but he is a vain man and a liar. He, however, only tells lies of vanity; of victories, for instance, in conversation, which never happened.” This alluded to a story which I had repeated from that gentleman, to entertain Johnson with its wild bravado: “This Johnson, Sir,” said he, “whom you are all afraid of, will shrink, if you come close to him in argument, and roar as loud as he. He once maintained the paradox, that there is no beauty but in utility.

‘Sir,’ said I, ‘what say you to the peacock’s tail, which is one of the most beautiful objects in nature, but would have as much utility if its feathers were all of one colour?’ He *felt* what I thus produced, and had recourse to his usual expedient, ridicule; exclaiming ‘A peacock has a tail, and a fox has a tail’; and then he burst out into a laugh.—‘Well, Sir,’ said I, with a strong voice, looking him full in the face, ‘you have unkennelled your fox; pursue him if you dare.’ He had not a word to say, Sir.”—Johnson told me, that this was fiction from beginning to end.

—*The Life.* 1783, March 21st.

It is remarkable, that notwithstanding their congeniality in politics, he never was acquainted with a late eminent noble judge, whom I have heard speak of him, as a writer, with great respect. Johnson, I know not upon what degree of investigation, entertained no exalted opinion of his lordship’s intellectual character. ‘Talking of him to me one day, he said, “It is wonderful, Sir, with how little real superiority of mind men can make an eminent figure in public life.” He expressed himself to the same purpose concerning another law-lord, who, it seems, once took a fancy to associate with the wits of London; but with so little success, that Foote said, “What can he mean by coming among us? He is not only dull himself, but the cause of dulness in others.” Trying him by the test of his colloquial powers, Johnson had found him very defective. He once said to

Sir Joshua Reynolds, "This man now has been ten years about town, and has made nothing of it;" meaning as a companion. He said to me, "I never heard anything from him in company that was at all striking; and depend upon it, Sir, it is when you come close to a man in conversation, that you discover what his real abilities are: to make a speech in a public assembly is a knack. Now I honour Thurlow, Sir; Thurlow is a fine fellow; he fairly puts his mind to yours."

After repeating to him some of his pointed, lively sayings, I said, "It is a pity, Sir, you don't always remember your own good things, that you may have a laugh when you will." JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir, it is better that I forget them, that I may be reminded of them, and have a laugh on their being brought to my recollection". —*The Life*. 1783, Spring.

Dr. Goldsmith said once to Dr. Johnson, that he wished for some additional members to the LITERARY CLUB, to give it an agreeable variety; for, said he, there can now be nothing new among us: we have travelled over one another's minds. Johnson seemed a little angry, and said, "Sir, you have not travelled over *my* mind, I promise you." Sir Joshua, however, thought Goldsmith right; observing, that "when people have lived a great deal together, they know what each of them will say on every subject. A new understanding, therefore, is desirable; because though it may only furnish the same sense upon a question

which would have been furnished by those with whom we are accustomed to live, yet this sense will have a different colouring; and colouring is of much effect in everything else as well as in painting."

Johnson used to say that he made it a constant rule to talk as well as he could both as to sentiment and expression, by which means, what had been originally effort became familiar and easy. The consequence of this, Sir Joshua observed, was, that his common conversation in all companies was such as to secure him universal attention, as something above the usual colloquial style was expected.

Yet, though Johnson had this habit in company, when another mode was necessary, in order to investigate truth, he could descend to a language intelligible to the meanest capacity. An instance of this was witnessed by Sir Joshua Reynolds, when they were present at an examination of a little blackguard boy by Mr. Saunders Welch, the late Westminster Justice. Welch, who imagined that he was exalting himself in Dr. Johnson's eyes by using big words, spoke in a manner that was utterly unintelligible to the boy; Dr. Johnson perceiving it, addressed himself to the boy, and changed the pompous phraseology into colloquial language. Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was much amused by this procedure, which seemed a kind of reversing of what might have been expected from the two men, took notice of it to Dr. Johnson, as they walked away by themselves. Johnson said that it was continually

the case; and that he was always obliged to *translate* the justice's swelling diction (smiling) so that his meaning might be understood by the vulgar, from whom information was to be obtained.

Sir Joshua once observed to him that he had talked above the capacity of some people with whom they had been in company together. "No matter, Sir," said Johnson; "they consider it as a compliment to be talked to, as if they were wiser than they are. So true is this, Sir, that Baxter made it a rule in every sermon that he preached, to say something that was above the capacity of his audience."

—*The Life*. 1783, Spring.

Though his usual phrase for conversation was *talk*, yet he made a distinction; for when he once told me that he dined the day before at a friend's house, with "a very pretty company"; and I asked him if there was good conversation, he answered, "No, Sir; we had *talk* enough, but no *conversation*; there was nothing *discussed*." —*The Life*. 1783, Spring.

His acute observation of human life made him remark, "Sir, there is nothing by which a man exasperates most people more than by displaying a superior ability of brilliancy in conversation. They seem pleased at the time: but their envy makes them curse him at their hearts."

—*The Life*. 1783, Spring.

A friend was one day, about two years

before his death, struck with some instance of Dr. Johnson's great candour. "Well, Sir," said he, "I will always say that you are a very candid man."—"Will you?" replied the Doctor; "I doubt then you will be very singular. But indeed, Sir," continued he, "I look upon myself to be a man very much misunderstood. I am not an uncandid, nor am I a severe man. I sometimes say more than I mean, in jest: and people are apt to believe me serious: however, I am more candid than I was when I was younger. As I know more of mankind, I expect less of them, and am ready now to call a man a *good man*, upon easier terms than I was formerly."

—*The Life*. 1783. "A Few Particulars."

On the evening of Saturday, May 15th, he was in fine spirits at our Essex Head Club. He told us, "I dined yesterday at Mrs. Garrick's with Mrs. Carter, Miss Hannah More, and Miss Fanny Burney. Three such women are not to be found: I know not where I could find a fourth, except Mrs. Lennox, who is superior to them all." BOSWELL: "What! had you them all to yourself, Sir?" JOHNSON: "I had them all, as much as they were had; but it might have been better had there been more company there". BOSWELL: "Might not Mrs. Montagu have been a fourth?" JOHNSON: "Sir, Mrs. Montagu does not make a trade of her wit; but Mrs. Montagu is a very extraordinary woman; she has a constant stream of conversation, and it is always im-

pregnated; it has always meaning". BOSWELL: "Mr. Burke has a constant stream of conversation". JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir; if a man were to go by chance at the same time with Burke under a shed, to shun a shower, he would say—'This is an extraordinary man.' If Burke should go into a stable to see his horse dressed, the ostler would say—'We have had an extraordinary man here.'" BOSWELL: "Foote was a man who never failed in conversation. If he had gone into a stable—" JOHNSON: "Sir, if he had gone into the stable, the ostler would have said, 'Here has been a comical fellow;' but he would not have respected him". BOSWELL: "And, Sir, the ostler would have answered him, would have given him as good as he brought, as the common saying is". JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir; and Foote would have answered the ostler.—When Burke does not descend to be merry, his conversation is very superior indeed. There is no proportion between the powers which he shows in serious talk and in jocularities. When he lets himself down to that, he is in the kennel."

—*The Life*. 1784, May 15th

We talked of our worthy friend Mr. Langton. He said, "I know not who will go to Heaven if Langton does not. Sir, I could almost say, *Sit anima mea cum Langtono*." I mentioned a very eminent friend as a virtuous man. JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, but —— has not the evangelical virtue of Langton. ——, I am afraid, would not scruple to pick up a wench."

He however charged Mr. Langton with what he thought want of judgment upon an interesting occasion. "When I was ill," said he, "I desired he would tell me sincerely in what he thought my life was faulty. Sir, he brought me a sheet of paper, on which he had written down several texts of Scripture, recommending Christian charity. And when I questioned him what occasion I had given for such an animadversion, all that he could say amounted to this,—that I sometimes contradicted people in conversation. Now what harm does it do to any man to be contradicted?" BOSWELL: "I suppose he meant the *manner* of doing it; roughly and harshly". JOHNSON: "And who is the worse for that?" BOSWELL: "It hurts people of weaker nerves". JOHNSON: "I know no such weak-nerved people". Mr. Burke, to whom I related this conference, said, "It is well if, when a man comes to die, he has nothing heavier upon his conscience, than having been a little rough in conversation."

Johnson, at the time when the paper was presented to him, though at first pleased with the attention of his friend, whom he thanked in an earnest manner, soon exclaimed, in a loud and angry tone, "What is your drift, Sir?" Sir Joshua Reynolds pleasantly observed, that it was a scene for a comedy, to see a penitent get into a violent passion, and belabour his confessor. —*The Life*. 1784, May 19th.

Dr. Johnson and I went in Dr. Adams's

coach to dine with Dr. Nowell, Principal of St. Mary Hall, at his beautiful villa at Iffley, on the banks of the Isis, about two miles from Oxford. While we were upon the road, I had the resolution to ask Johnson whether he thought that the roughness of his manner had been an advantage or not, and if he would not have done more good, if he had been more gentle. I proceeded to answer myself thus: "Perhaps it has been of advantage, as it has given weight to what you said: you could not, perhaps, have talked with such authority without it." JOHNSON: "No, Sir; I have done more good as I am. Obscenity and impiety have always been repressed in my company." BOSWELL: "True, Sir; and that is more than can be said of every Bishop. Greater liberties have been taken in the presence of a Bishop, though a very good man, from his being milder, and therefore not commanding such awe. Yet, Sir, many people who might have been benefited by your conversation, have been frightened away. A worthy friend of ours has told me, that he has often been afraid to talk to you." JOHNSON: "Sir, he need not have been afraid, if he had anything rational to say. If he had not, it was better he did not talk."

—*The Life*. 1784, June 11th.

We this day dined at Sir Joshua Reynolds's with General Paoli, Lord Eliot (formerly Mr. Eliot, of Port Eliot), Dr. Beattie, and some other company. Talking of Lord Chesterfield:—JOHNSON: "His manner was exquisitely

elegant, and he had more knowledge than I expected". BOSWELL: "Did you find, Sir, his conversation to be of a superior style?" JOHNSON: "Sir, in the conversation which I had with him I had the best right to superiority, for it was upon philology and literature."

—*The Life.* 1784, June 27th.

Sir Joshua Reynolds having said that he took the altitude of a man's taste by his stories and his wit, and of his understanding by the remarks which he repeated; being always sure that he must be a weak man who quotes common things with an emphasis as if they were oracles;—Johnson agreed with him; and Sir Joshua having also observed that the real character of a man was found out by his amusement—Johnson added, "Yes, Sir; no man is a hypocrite in his pleasures."

I have mentioned Johnson's general aversion to pun. He once, however, endured one of mine.—When we were talking of a numerous company in which he had distinguished himself highly, I said, "Sir, you were a cod surrounded by smelts. Is not this enough for you? at a time too when you were not *fishing* for a compliment?" He laughed at this with a complacent approbation. Old Mr. Sheridan observed, upon my mentioning it to him, "He liked your compliment so well, he was willing to take it with *pun sauce*." For my own part, I think no innocent species of wit or pleasantry should be suppressed: and that a good pun may be

admitted among the smaller excellencies of lively conversation. —*The Life.* 1784.

He once in his life was known to have uttered what is called a *bull*; Sir Joshua Reynolds, when they were riding together in Devonshire, complained that he had a very bad horse, for that even when going downhill he moved slowly step by step. "Ay," said Johnson, "and when he *goes* uphill, he *stands still*."

He had a great aversion to gesticulating in company. He called once to a gentleman who offended him in that point, "Don't *attitudinize*." And when another gentleman thought he was giving additional force to what he uttered, by expressive movements of his hands, Johnson fairly seized them, and held them down.

An author of considerable eminence having engrossed a good share of the conversation in the company of Johnson, and having said nothing but what was trifling and insignificant; Johnson, when he was gone, observed to us, "It is wonderful what a difference there sometimes is between a man's powers of writing and talking. — writes with great spirit, but is a poor talker; had he held his tongue, we might have supposed him to have been restrained by modesty; but he has spoken a great deal to-day; and have you heard what stuff it was?" —*The Life.* 1784.

“TO MR. GEORGE NICOL, ESQ.

“*Ashbourne, Aug. 19, 1784.*

“DEAR SIR,

“Since we parted, I have been much oppressed by my asthma, but it has lately been less laborious. When I sit I am almost at ease, and I can walk, though yet very little, with less difficulty for this week past, than before. I hope I shall again enjoy my friends, and that you and I shall have a little more literary conversation. Where I now am, everything is very liberally provided for me but conversation. My friend is sick himself, and the reciprocation of complaints and groans afford not much of either pleasure or instruction. What we have not at home this town does not supply, and I shall be glad of a little imported intelligence, and hope that you will bestow now and then, a little time on the relief, and entertainment of, Sir, yours, &c.,

“SAM. JOHNSON.”

—*The Life.* 1784, Aug. 19th.

The Art of Conversation

JOHNSON'S PRACTICE

HIS MANNER AND METHOD

Sir Joshua Reynolds once asked him by what means he had attained his extraordinary accuracy and flow of language. He told him that he had early laid it down as a fixed rule to do his best on every occasion, and in every company...to impart whatever he knew in the most forcible language he could put it in...and that by constant practice, and never suffering any careless expressions to escape him, or attempting to deliver his thoughts without arranging them in the clearest manner, it became habitual to him.

—*The Life.* 1750.

During this argument, Goldsmith sat in restless agitation, from a wish to get in and *shine*. Finding himself excluded, he had taken his hat to go away, but remained for some time with it in his hand, like a gamester, who, at the close of a long night lingers for a little while to see if he can have a favourable opening to finish with success. Once when he was beginning to speak, he found himself overpowered by the loud voice

of Johnson, who was at the opposite end of the table, and did not perceive Goldsmith's attempt. Thus disappointed of his wish to obtain the attention of the company, Goldsmith in a passion threw down his hat, looking angrily at Johnson, and exclaimed in a bitter tone, "*Take it*".

—*The Life*. 1773, May 7th

He had a loud voice, and a slow deliberate utterance, which no doubt gave some additional weight to the sterling metal of his conversation. Lord Pembroke said once to me at Wilton, with a happy pleasantry, and some truth, that "Dr. Johnson's sayings would not appear so extraordinary, were it not for his *bow-wow way*"; but I admit the truth of this only on some occasions. The *Messiah*, played upon *Canterbury organ*, is more sublime than when played upon an inferior instrument: but very slight music will seem grand, when conveyed to the ear through that majestic medium. *While therefore Dr. Johnson's sayings are read, let his manner be taken along with them.* Let it however be observed, that the sayings themselves are generally great; that, though he might be an ordinary composer at times, he was for the most part a Handel.

—*The Tour*. 1773. Introduction.

As we were going, the Scottish phrase of *honest man!* which is an expression of kindness and regard, was again and again applied by the company to Dr. Johnson. I was also treated with much civility; and I must take some

merit from my assiduous attention to him, and from my contriving that he shall be easy wherever he goes, that he shall not be asked twice to eat or drink anything (which always disgusts him), that he shall be provided with water at his meals, and many such little things, which, if not attended to, would fret him. I also may be allowed to claim some merit in leading the conversation: I do not mean leading, as in an orchestra, by playing the first fiddle; but leading as one does in examining a witness,—starting topics, and making him pursue them. He appears to me like a great mill, into which a subject is thrown to be ground. It requires, indeed, fertile minds to furnish materials for this mill. I regret whenever I see it unemployed: but sometimes I feel myself quite barren, and having nothing to throw in. I know not if this mill be a good figure; though Pope makes his mind a mill for turning verses.

—*The Tour*. 1773, Sept. 28th.

I mentioned a new gaming club, of which Mr. Beauclerk had given me an account, where the members played to a desperate extent. JOHNSON: "Depend upon it, Sir, this is mere talk. *Who* is ruined by gaming? You will not find six instances in an age. There is a strange rout made about deep play: whereas you have many more people ruined by adventurous trade, and yet we do not hear such an outcry against it." THRALE: "There may be few people absolutely ruined by deep play; but very many

are much hurt in their circumstances by it". JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, and so are very many by other kinds of expense". I had heard him talk once before in the same manner; and at Oxford he said, "he wished he had learned to play at cards". The truth, however, is, that he loved to display his ingenuity in argument; and, therefore, would sometimes in conversation maintain opinions which he was sensible were wrong, but in supporting which, his reasoning and wit would be most conspicuous. He would begin thus: "Why, Sir, as to the good or evil of card-playing—" "Now," said Garrick, "he is thinking which side he shall take." He appeared to have a pleasure in contradiction, especially when any opinion whatever was delivered with an air of confidence; so that there was hardly any topic, if not one of the great truths of Religion and Morality, that he might not have been incited to argue, either for or against. Lord Elibank had the highest admiration of his powers. He once observed to me, "Whatever opinions Johnson maintains, I will not say that he convinces me; but he never fails to show me that he has good reasons for it." I have heard Johnson pay his lordship this high compliment: "I never was in Lord Elibank's company without learning something."

—*The Life*. 1776, April 5th.

Tuesday, September 16th, Dr. Johnson having mentioned to me the extraordinary size and price of some cattle reared by Dr. Taylor, I rode out with our host, surveyed his farm,

and was shown one cow which he had sold for a hundred and twenty guineas, and another for which he had been offered a hundred and thirty. Taylor thus described to me his old schoolfellow and friend, Johnson :—"He is a man of a very clear head, great power of words, and a very gay imagination ; but there is no disputing with him. He will not hear you, and, having a louder voice than you, must roar you down."

—*The Life.* 1777, September 16th.

I went to Streatham on Monday, March 30th. Before he appeared, Mrs. Thrale made a very characteristical remark :—"I do not know for certain what will please Dr. Johnson : but I know for certain that it will displease him to praise anything, even what he likes, extravagantly."

—*The Life.* 1778, March 30th.

On Monday, April 13th, I dined with Johnson at Mr. Langton's, where were Dr. Porteus, then Bishop of Chester, now of London, and Dr. Stinton. He was at first in a very silent mood. Before dinner he said nothing but "Pretty baby" to one of the children. Langton said very well to me afterwards, that he could repeat Johnson's conversation before dinner, as Johnson had said that he could repeat a complete chapter of "The Natural History of Iceland", from the Danish of *Horrebow*, the whole of which was exactly thus :—

“CHAP. LXXII. *Concerning Snakes*

“There are no snakes to be met with throughout the whole island.”

—*The Life*. 1778, April 13th.

On Wednesday, April 15th, I dined with Dr. Johnson at Mr. Dilly's, and was in high spirits, for I had been a good part of the morning with Mr. Orme, the able and eloquent historian of Hindostan, who expressed a great admiration of Johnson. “I do not care,” said he, “on what subject Johnson talks: but I love better to hear him talk than anybody. He either gives you new thoughts or a new colouring. It is a shame to the nation that he has not been more liberally rewarded. Had I been George the Third, and thought as he did about America, I would have given Johnson three hundred a year for his *Taxation no Tyranny* alone.” I repeated this, and Johnson was much pleased with such praise from such a man as Orme.

—*The Life*. 1778, April 15th.

“The style and character of his conversation is pretty generally known; it was certainly conducted in conformity with a precept of Lord Bacon, but it is not clear, I apprehend, that this conformity was either perceived or intended by Johnson. The precept alluded to is as follows:—‘In all kinds of speech, either pleasant, grave, severe, or ordinary, it is convenient to speak leisurely, and rather drawlingly than hastily; because hasty speech con-

founds the memory, and oftentimes, besides the unseemliness, drives a man either to stammering, a nonplus, or harping on that which should follow ; whereas a slow speech confirmeth the memory, addeth a conceit of wisdom to the hearers, besides a seemliness of speech and countenance.' Dr. Johnson's method of conversation was certainly calculated to excite attention, and to amuse and instruct (as it happened), without wearying or confusing his company. He was always most perfectly clear and perspicuous, and his language was so accurate, and his sentences so neatly constructed, that his conversation might have been all printed without any correction. At the same time, it was easy and natural ; the accuracy of it had no appearance of labour, constraint, or stiffness : he seemed more correct than others, by the force of habit, and the customary exercises of his powerful mind."

—*The Life*. 1783. "A Few Particulars."

Here it may be observed, that his frequent use of the expression, *No, Sir*, was not always to intimate contradiction ; for he would say so when he was about to enforce an affirmative proposition which had not been denied, as in the instance last mentioned. I used to consider it as a kind of flag of defiance : as if he had said, "Any argument you may offer against this, is not just. No, Sir, it is not." It was like Falstaff's "I deny your Major."

—*The Life*. 1784.

As he was general and unconfined in his studies, he cannot be considered as master of any one particular science; but he had accumulated a vast and various collection of learning and knowledge, which was so arranged in his mind as to be ever in readiness to be brought forth. But his superiority over other learned men consisted chiefly in what may be called the art of thinking, the art of using his mind—a certain continual power of seizing the useful substance of all that he knew, and exhibiting it in a clear and forcible manner; so that knowledge, which we often see to be no better than lumber in men of dull understanding, was in him true, evident, and actual wisdom. His moral precepts are practical; for they are drawn from an intimate acquaintance with human nature. His maxims carry conviction; for they are founded on the basis of common sense, and a very attentive and minute survey of real life. His mind was so full of imagery, that he might have been perpetually a poet; yet it is remarkable, that however rich his prose is in this respect, his poetical pieces, in general, have not much of that splendour, but are rather distinguished by strong sentiment, and acute observation, conveyed in harmonious and energetic verse, particularly in heroic couplets. Though usually grave, and even awful in his deportment, he possessed uncommon and peculiar powers of wit and humour; he frequently indulged himself in colloquial pleasantry; and the heartiest merriment was often enjoyed in his company; with this great

advantage, that it was entirely free from any poisonous tincture of vice or impiety—it was salutary to those who shared in it. He had accustomed himself to such accuracy in his common conversation, that he at all times expressed his thoughts with great force, and an elegant choice of language, the effect of which was aided by his having a loud voice, and a slow deliberate utterance. In him were united a most logical head with a most fertile imagination, which gave him an extraordinary advantage in arguing; for he could reason close or wide, as he saw best for the moment. Exulting in his intellectual strength and dexterity, he could, when he pleased, be the greatest sophist that ever contended in the lists of declamation; and, from a spirit of contradiction and a delight in showing his powers, he would often maintain the wrong side with equal warmth and ingenuity; so that when there was an audience, his real opinions could seldom be gathered from his talk; though when he was in company with a single friend, he would discuss a subject with genuine fairness; but he was too conscientious to make error permanent and pernicious, by deliberately writing it; and in all his numerous works, he earnestly inculcated what appeared to him to be the truth; his piety being constant, and the ruling principle of all his conduct. —*The Life. Final Page.*

Having asked Mr. Langton if his father and mother had sat for their pictures, which he thought it right for each generation of a family

to do, and being told they had opposed it, he said, "Sir, among the anfractuosities of the human mind, I know not if it may not be one, that there is a superstitious reluctance to sit for a picture."

—*The Life.* 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's *Johnsoniana*.

Talking of a very respectable author, he told us a curious circumstance in his life, which was, that he had married a printer's devil. REYNOLDS: "A printer's devil, Sir! Why, I thought a printer's devil was a creature with a black face and in rags." JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir. But I suppose he had her face washed, and put clean clothes on her. (Then looking very serious and very earnest.) And she did not disgrace him;—the woman had a bottom of good sense." The word *bottom*, thus introduced, was so ludicrous, when contrasted with his gravity, that most of us could not forbear tittering and laughing; though I recollect that the Bishop of Killaloe kept his countenance with perfect steadiness, while Miss Hannah More slyly hid her face behind a lady's back who sat on the same settee with her. His pride could not bear that any expression of his should excite ridicule, when he did not intend it; he therefore resolved to assume and exercise despotic power, glanced sternly around, and called out, in a strong tone, "Where's the merriment?" Then collecting himself, and looking awful, to make us feel how he could impose restraint, and as it were searching his

mind for a still more ludicrous word, he slowly pronounced, "I say the *woman* was *fundamentally* sensible;" as if he had said, hear this now, and laugh if you dare. We all sat composed as at a funeral. —*The Life*. 1781, April 20th.

He seemed to take a pleasure in speaking in his own style; for when he had carelessly missed it, he would repeat the thought translated into it. Talking of the comedy of *The Rehearsal*, he said, "It has not wit enough to keep it sweet." This was easy; he therefore caught himself, and pronounced a more round sentence: "It has not vitality enough to preserve it from putrefaction."

—*The Life*. 1784.

HIS INFORMATION AND ZEAL FOR KNOWLEDGE

Before dinner we examined the fort. The Major explained the fortification to us, and Mr. Ferne gave us an account of the stores. Dr. Johnson talked of the proportions of charcoal and saltpetre in making gunpowder, of granulating it, and of giving it a gloss. He made a very good figure upon these topics. He said to me afterwards, that "he had talked *ostentatiously*".

—*The Tour*. 1773, Aug. 28th.

Dr. Johnson has the happy art (for which I have heard my father praise the old Earl of Aberdeen) of instructing himself, by making every man he meets tell him something of what

he knows best. He led Keith to talk to him of the Excise in Scotland, and, in the course of conversation, mentioned that his friend Mr. Thrale, the great brewer, paid twenty thousand pounds a year to the revenue; and that he had four casks, each of which holds sixteen hundred barrels,—above a thousand hogsheads.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 29th.

Dr. Johnson was now wishing to move. There was not enough of intellectual entertainment for him, after he had satisfied his curiosity, which he did, by asking questions, till he had exhausted the island; and where there was so numerous a company, mostly young people, there was such a flow of familiar talk, so much noise, and so much singing and dancing, that little opportunity was left for his energetic conversation. He seemed sensible of this; for when I told him how happy they were at having him there, he said, "Yet we have not been able to entertain them much." I was fretted, from irritability of nerves, by M'Cruslick's too obstreperous mirth. I complained of it to my friend, observing we should be better if he was gone. "No, Sir," said he, "he puts something into our society, and takes nothing out of it." Dr. Johnson, however, had several opportunities of instructing the company: but I am sorry to say, that I did not pay sufficient attention to what passed, as his discourse now turned chiefly on mechanics, agriculture, and such subjects, rather than on science and wit. Last night Lady Rasay

showed him the operation of *wauking* cloth, that is, thickening it in the same manner as is done by a mill. Here it is performed by women, who kneel upon the ground, and rub it with both their hands, singing an Erse song all the time. He was asking questions while they were performing this operation, and, amidst their loud and wild howl, his voice was heard even in the room above.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 11th.

I have often been astonished with what exactness and perspicuity he will explain the process of any art. He this morning explained to us all the operation of coining, and, at night, all the operation of brewing, so very clearly, that Mr. M'Queen said, when he heard the first, he thought he had been bred in the Mint; when he heard the second, that he had been bred a brewer.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 16th.

After the ladies were gone from table, we talked of the Highlanders not having sheets; and this led us to consider the advantage of wearing linen. JOHNSON: "All animal substances are less cleanly than vegetables. Wool, of which flannel is made, is an animal substance; flannel therefore is not so cleanly as linen. I remember I used to think tar dirty; but when I knew it to be only a preparation of the juice of the pine, I thought so no longer. It is not disagreeable to have the gum that oozes from a plum-tree upon your fingers,

because it is vegetable; but if you have any candle-grease, any tallow upon your fingers, you are uneasy till you rub it off. I have often thought, that, if I kept a seraglio, the ladies should all wear linen gowns, or cotton; I mean stuffs made of vegetable substances. I would have no silk; you cannot tell when it is clean: it will be very nasty before it is perceived to be so. Linen detects its own dirtiness."

To hear the grave Dr. Samuel Johnson, "that majestic teacher of moral and religious wisdom", while sitting solemn in an arm-chair in the Isle of Sky, talk, *ex cathedra*, of his keeping a seraglio, and acknowledge that the supposition had *often* been in his thoughts, struck me so forcibly with ludicrous contrast, that I could not but laugh immoderately. He was too proud to submit, even for a moment, to be the object of ridicule, and instantly retaliated with such keen sarcastic wit, and such a variety of degrading images, of every one of which I was the object, that, though I can bear such attacks as well as most men, I yet found myself so much the sport of all the company, that I would gladly expunge from my mind every trace of this severe retort.

—*The Tour*. 1773, Sept. 16th.

After supper he said, "I am sorry that prize-fighting is gone out; every art should be preserved, and the art of defence is surely important. It is absurd that our soldiers should have swords, and not be taught the use

of them. Prize-fighting made people accustomed not to be alarmed at seeing their own blood, or feeling a little pain from a wound. I think the heavy *glaymore* was an ill-contrived weapon. A man could only strike once with it. It employed both his hands, and he must of course be soon fatigued with wielding it; so that if his antagonist could only keep playing a while, he was sure of him. I would fight with a dirk against Rorie More's sword. I could ward off a blow with a dirk, and then run in upon my enemy. When within that heavy sword, I have him; he is quite helpless, and I could stab him at my leisure, like a calf. It is thought by sensible military men, that the English do not enough avail themselves of their superior strength of body against the French; for that must always have a great advantage in pushing with bayonets. I have heard an officer say, that if women could be made to stand, they would do as well as men in a mere interchange of bullets from a distance: but, if a body of men should come close up to them, then to be sure they must be overcome; now," said he, "in the same manner the weaker-bodied French must be overcome by our strong soldiers."

—*The Tour*. 1773, Sept. 19th.

Last night Dr. Johnson gave us an account of the whole process of tanning, and of the nature of milk, and the various operations upon it, as making whey, &c. His variety of information is surprising; and it gives one much

satisfaction to find such a man bestowing his attention on the useful arts of life. Ulinish was much struck with his knowledge; and said, "He is a great orator, Sir; it is music to hear this man speak." A strange thought struck me, to try if he knew anything of an art, or whatever it should be called, which is no doubt very useful in life, but which lies far out of the way of a philosopher and poet; I mean the trade of a butcher. I enticed him into the subject, by connecting it with the various researches into the manners and customs of uncivilized nations, that have been made by our late navigators into the South Seas. I began with observing, that Mr. (now Sir Joseph) Banks tells us, that the art of slaughtering animals was not known in Otaheite, for, instead of bleeding to death their dogs (a common food with them), they strangle them. This he told me himself; and I supposed that their hogs were killed in the same way. Dr. Johnson said, "This must be owing to their not having knives, though they have sharp stones with which they can cut a carcass in pieces tolerably." By degrees, he showed that he knew something even of butchery. "Different animals," said he, "are killed differently. An ox is knocked down, and a calf stunned; but a sheep has its throat cut, without anything being done to stupefy it. The butchers have no view to the ease of the animals, but only to make them quiet, for their own safety and convenience. A sheep can give them little trouble. Hales is of opinion,

that every animal should be blooded, without having any blow given to it, because it bleeds better." BOSWELL: "That would be cruel". JOHNSON: "No, Sir; there is not much pain, if the jugular vein be properly cut". Pursuing the subject, he said, the kennels of Southwark ran with blood two or three days in the week; that he was afraid there were slaughter-houses in more streets in London than one supposes (speaking with a kind of horror of butchering); "and yet," he added, "any of us would kill a cow, rather than not have beef." I said we *could* not. "Yes," said he, "anyone may. The business of a butcher is a trade indeed, that is to say, there is an apprenticeship served to it; but it may be learnt in a month."

—*The Tour*. 1773, Sept. 23rd.

We danced to-night to the music of the bagpipe, which made us beat the ground with prodigious force. I thought it better to endeavour to conciliate the kindness of the people of Sky, by joining heartily in their amusements, than to play the abstract scholar. I looked on this Tour to the Hebrides as a copartnership between Dr. Johnson and me. Each was to do all he could to promote its success; and I have some reason to flatter myself that my gayer exertions were of service to us. Dr. Johnson's immense fund of knowledge and wit was a wonderful source of admiration and delight to them; but they had it only at times; and they required to have the intervals agreeably filled up, and even little

elucidations of his learned text. I was also fortunate enough frequently to draw him forth to talk, when he would otherwise have been silent. The fountain was at times locked up, till I opened the spring. It was curious to hear the Hebridians, when any dispute happened while he was out of the room, saying, "Stay till Dr. Johnson comes: say that to him!"

—*The Tour.* 1773, Oct. 2nd.

At Grisspol we found a good farmhouse, belonging to the Laird of Col, and possessed by Mr. M'Sweyn. On the beach here there is a singular variety of curious stones. I picked up one very like a small cucumber. By the by, Dr. Johnson told me, that Gay's line in the *Beggars' Opera*, "As men should serve a cucumber", &c., has no waggish meaning, with reference to men flinging away cucumbers as too *cooling*, which some have thought; for it has been a common saying of physicians in England, that a cucumber should be well sliced, and dressed with pepper and vinegar, and then thrown out, as good for nothing.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Oct. 5th.

On my expressing my wonder at his discovering so much of the knowledge peculiar to different professions, he told me, "I learnt what I know of law chiefly from Mr. Ballow, a very able man. I learnt some too from Chambers; but was not so teachable then. One is not willing to be taught by a young man." When I expressed a wish to know more about Mr.

Ballow, Johnson said, "Sir, I have seen him but once these twenty years. The tide of life has driven us different ways." I was sorry at the time to hear this; but whoever quits the creeks of private connections, and fairly gets into the great ocean of London, will by imperceptible degrees, unavoidably experience such cessations of acquaintance.

"My knowledge of physic," he added, "I learnt from Dr. James, whom I helped in writing the proposals for his Dictionary, and also a little in the Dictionary itself. I also learnt from Dr. Lawrence, but was then grown more stubborn." —*The Life*. 1776, April 5th.

I felt a pleasure in walking about Derby, such as I always have in walking about any town to which I am not accustomed. There is an immediate sensation of novelty; and one speculates on the way in which life is passed in it, which, although there is a sameness everywhere upon the whole, is yet minutely diversified. The minute diversities in everything are wonderful. Talking of shaving the other night at Dr. Taylor's, Dr. Johnson said, "Sir, of a thousand shavers, two do not shave so much alike as not to be distinguished." I thought this not possible, till he specified so many of the varieties in shaving;—holding the razor more or less perpendicular;—drawing long or short strokes;—beginning at the upper part of the face, or the under—at the right side or the left side. Indeed, when one considers what variety of sounds can be uttered by the wind-

pipe, in the compass of a very small aperture, we may be convinced how many degrees of difference there may be in the application of a razor.

—*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 19th.

During this interview at Ashbourne, Johnson seemed to be more uniformly social, cheerful, and alert, than I had almost ever seen him. He was prompt on great occasions and on small. Taylor, who praised everything of his own to excess; in short, “whose geese were all swans”, as the proverb says, expatiated on the excellence of his bull-dog, which he told us was “perfectly well-shaped”. Johnson, after examining the animal attentively, thus repressed the vain glory of our host:—“No, Sir, he is *not* well-shaped; for there is not the quick transition from the thickness of the forepart to the *tenuity*—the thin part—behind, which a bull-dog ought to have.” This *tenuity* was the only *hard word* that I heard him use during this interview, and, it will be observed, he instantly put another expression in its place. Taylor said, a small bull-dog was as good as a large one. JOHNSON: “No, Sir; for in proportion to his size he has strength; and your argument would prove that a good bull-dog may be as small as a mouse”. It was amazing how he entered with perspicuity and keenness upon everything that occurred in conversation. Most men whom I know, would no more think of discussing a question about a bull-dog, than of attacking a bull.

—*The Life*. 1777, Sept.

He used to descant critically on the dishes which had been at table where he had dined or supped, and to recollect very minutely what he had liked. I remember when he was in Scotland, his praising "*Gordon's palates*" (a dish of palates at the Honourable Alexander Gordon's) with a warmth of expression which might have done honour to more important subjects. "As for Maclaurin's imitation of a *made dish*, it was a wretched attempt." He about the same time was so much displeased with the performances of a nobleman's French cook, that he exclaimed with vehemence, "I'd throw such a rascal into the river"; and he then proceeded to alarm a lady at whose house he was to sup, by the following manifesto of his skill:—"I, Madam, who live at a variety of good tables, am a much better judge of cookery than any person who has a very tolerable cook, but lives much at home; for his palate is gradually adapted to the taste of his cook; whereas, Madam, in trying by a wider range, I can more exquisitely judge." When invited to dine, even with an intimate friend, he was not pleased if something better than a plain dinner was not prepared for him. I have heard him say, on such an occasion, "This was a good dinner enough to be sure; but it was not a dinner to *ask* a man to." On the other hand, he was wont to express with great glee, his satisfaction when he had been entertained quite to his mind. One day when he had dined with his neighbour and landlord, in Bolt Court, Mr. Allen, the printer, whose old

housekeeper had studied his taste in everything, he pronounced this eulogy: "Sir, we could not have had a better dinner, had there been a *Synod of Cooks*."

—*The Life*. 1763, Aug. 5th.

The subject of cookery having been very naturally introduced at a table where Johnson, who boasted of the niceness of his palate, owned that "he always found a good dinner", he said, "I could write a better book of cookery than has ever yet been written; it should be a book upon philosophical principles. Pharmacy is now made much more simple. Cookery may be made so too. A prescription, which is now compounded of five ingredients, had formerly fifty in it. So in cookery, if the nature of the ingredients be well known, much fewer will do. Then, as you cannot make bad meat good, I would tell what is the best butcher's meat, the best beef, the best pieces: how to choose young fowls; the proper seasons of different vegetables; and then how to roast and boil, and compound." DILLY: "Mrs. Glasse's *Cookery*, which is the best, was written by Dr. Hill. Half the *trade* know this." JOHNSON: "Well, Sir, this shows how much better the subject of cookery may be treated by a philosopher. I doubt if the book be written by Dr. Hill; for, in Mrs. Glasse's *Cookery*, which I have looked into, saltpetre and sal-prunella are spoken of as different substances, whereas sal-prunella is only saltpetre burnt on charcoal; and Hill could not be ignorant of this. However, as the greatest

part of such a book is made by transcription, this mistake may have been carelessly adopted. But you shall see what a book of cookery I shall make! I shall agree with Mr. Dilly for the copyright." MISS SEWARD: "That would be Hercules with the distaff indeed". JOHNSON: "No, Madam. Women can spin very well; but they cannot make a good book of cookery." —*The Life*. 1778, April 15th.

Mr. Langton has been pleased, at my request, to favour me with some particulars of Dr. Johnson's visit to Warley Camp, where this gentleman was at the time stationed as a Captain in the Lincolnshire militia. I shall give them in his own words, in a letter to me:—

"It was in the summer of the year 1778 that he complied with my invitation to come down to the camp at Warley, and he stayed with me about a week. The scene appeared, notwithstanding a great degree of ill health that he seemed to labour under, to interest and amuse him, as agreeing with the disposition that I believe you know he constantly manifested towards enquiring into subjects of the military kind. He sat, with a patient degree of attention, to observe the proceedings of a regimental court-martial, that happened to be called in the time of his stay with us; and one night, as late as eleven o'clock, he accompanied the Major of the regiment in going what was styled the *Rounds*, where he might observe the forms of visiting the guards, for seeing that they and their sentries are ready in their duty on their

several posts. He took occasion to converse at times on military topics, one in particular that I see the mention of, in your *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, which lies open before me, as to gunpowder; which he spoke of to the same effect, in part, that you relate.

“On one occasion, when the regiment were going through their exercise, he went quite close to the men at one of the extremities of it, and watched all their practice attentively; and when he came away his remark was, ‘The men indeed do load their muskets and fire with wonderful celerity.’ He was likewise particular in enquiring to know what was the weight of the musket balls in use, and within what distance they might be expected to take effect when fired off.

“In walking among the tents, and observing the difference between those of the officers and private men, he said, that the superiority of accommodation of the better conditions of life, to that of the inferior ones, was never exhibited to him in so distinct a view. The civilities paid to him in the camp were from the gentlemen of the Lincolnshire regiment, one of the officers of which accommodated him with a tent in which he slept; and from General Hall, who very courteously invited him to dine with him, where he appeared to be very well pleased with this entertainment, and the civilities he received on the part of the General; the attention likewise of the General’s aide-de-camp, Captain Smith, seemed to be very welcome to him, as appeared by their engaging in a great deal of

discourse together. The gentlemen of the East York regiment likewise, on being informed of his coming, solicited his company at dinner; but by that time he had fixed his departure, so that he could not comply with the invitation."

—*The Life*. 1778, Summer.

BOSWELL: "Why, Sir, do people play this trick which I observe now, when I look at your grate, putting the shovel against it to make the fire burn?" JOHNSON: "They play the trick, but it does not make the fire burn. *There* is a better; setting the poker perpendicularly up at right angles with the grate. In the days of superstition they thought as it made a cross with the bars, it would drive away the witch."

—*The Life*. 1779, Oct. 10th.

BOSWELL: "I observe in London, that the poor go about and gather bones, which I understand are manufactured." JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir; they boil them, and extract a grease from them for greasing wheels and other purposes. Of the best pieces they make a mock ivory, which is used for hafts to knives, and various other things; the coarser pieces they burn and pound, and sell the ashes." BOSWELL: "For what purpose, Sir?" JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, for making a furnace for the chemists for melting iron. A paste made of burnt bones will stand a stronger heat than anything else. Consider, Sir, if you are to melt iron, you cannot line your pot with brass, because it is softer

than iron, and would melt sooner; nor with iron, for though malleable iron is harder than cast iron, yet it would not do; but a paste of burnt bones will not melt." BOSWELL: "Do you know, Sir, I have discovered a manufacture to a great extent, of what you only piddle at—scraping and drying the peel of oranges. At a place in Newgate Street, there is a prodigious quantity prepared, which they sell to the distillers." JOHNSON: "Sir, I believe they make a higher thing out of them than a spirit; they make what is called orange-butter, the oil of the orange inspissated, which they mix perhaps with common pomatum, and make it fragrant. The oil does not fly off in the drying."

—*The Life*. 1783. April 18th.

HIS DEXTERITY AND BRUTALITY OF RETORT

Mrs. Thrale disputed with him on the merit of Prior. He attacked him powerfully; said he wrote of love like a man who had never felt it: his love verses were college verses; and he repeated the song "Alexis shunn'd his fellow swains", &c., in so ludicrous a manner, as to make us all wonder how anyone could have been pleased with such fantastical stuff. Mrs. Thrale stood to her gun with great courage in defence of amorous ditties, which Johnson despised, till he at last silenced her by saying, "My dear lady, talk no more of this. Nonsense can be defended but by nonsense."

Mrs. Thrale then praised Garrick's talents for light gay poetry; and, as a specimen, repeated

his song in *Florizel and Perdita*, and dwelt with peculiar pleasure on this line :

“I’d smile with the simple, and feed with the poor”.

JOHNSON : “Nay, my dear lady, this will never do. Poor David ! Smile with the simple. What folly is that ? And who would feed with the poor that can help it ? No, no ; let me smile with the wise, and feed with the rich.” I repeated this sally to Garrick, and wondered to find his sensibility as a writer not a little irritated by it. To soothe him I observed that Johnson spared none of us ; and I quoted the passage in Horace, in which he compares one who attacks his friends for the sake of a laugh, to a pushing ox, that is marked by a bunch of hay put upon his horns : *facnum habet in cornu*. “Ay,” said Garrick, vehemently, “he has a whole *more* of it.”

—*The Life*. 1769, Oct. 6th.

Talking of a barrister who had a bad utterance, someone (to rouse Johnson) wickedly said, that he was unfortunate in not having been taught oratory by Sheridan. JOHNSON : “Nay, Sir, if he had been taught by Sheridan, he would have cleared the room”. GARRICK : “Sheridan has too much vanity to be a good man”.—We shall now see Johnson’s mode of *defending* a man ; taking him into his own hands, and discriminating. JOHNSON : “No, Sir. There is, to be sure, in Sheridan, something to reprehend and everything to laugh at ; but, Sir, he is not a bad man. No, Sir ; were

mankind to be divided into good and bad, he would stand considerably within the ranks of good. And, Sir, it must be allowed that Sheridan excels in plain declamation, though he can exhibit no character."

I should, perhaps, have suppressed this disquisition concerning a person of whose merit and worth I think with respect, had he not attacked Johnson so outrageously in his *Life of Swift*, and at the same time, treated us, his admirers, as a set of pigmies. He who has provoked the lash of wit, cannot complain that he smarts from it.

—*The Life*. 1769, Oct. 16th.

There was a pretty large circle this evening. Dr. Johnson was in very good humour, lively, and ready to talk upon all subjects. Mr. Fergusson, the self-taught philosopher, told him of a new invented machine which went without horses; a man who sat in it turned a handle, which worked a spring that drove it forward. "Then, Sir," said Johnson, "what is gained is, the man has his choice whether he will move himself alone, or himself and the machine too." Dominicetti being mentioned, he would not allow him any merit. "There is nothing in all this boasted system. No, Sir; medicated baths can be no better than warm water; their only effect can be that of tepid moisture." One of the company took the other side, maintaining that medicines of various sorts, and some too of most powerful effect, are introduced into the human frame by the medium of the pores; and, therefore when warm water is

impregnated with salutiferous substances, it may produce great effects as a bath. This appeared to me very satisfactory. Johnson did not answer it; but talking for victory, and determined to be master of the field, he had recourse to the device which Goldsmith imputed to him in the witty words of one of Cibber's comedies: "There is no arguing with Johnson; for when his pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt-end of it." He turned to the gentleman, "Well, Sir, go to Dominicetti, and get thyself fumigated; but be sure that the steam be directed to thy *head*, for *that* is the *peccant part*." This produced a triumphant roar of laughter from the motley assembly of philosophers, printers, and dependents, male and female.

—*The Life*. 1769, Oct. 26th.

"When exasperated by contradiction, he was apt to treat his opponents with too much acrimony: as, 'Sir, you don't see your way through that question. Sir, you talk the language of ignorance.' On my observing to him that a certain gentleman had remained silent the whole evening, in the midst of a very brilliant and learned society, 'Sir,' said he, 'the conversation overflowed and drowned him.'"

—*The Life*. 1770. Dr. Maxwell's *Collectanea*.

I spoke of Allan Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd*, in the Scottish dialect, as the best pastoral that had ever been written; not only abounding

with beautiful rural imagery, and just and pleasing sentiments, but being a real picture of manners; and I offered to teach Dr. Johnson to understand it. "No, Sir," said he, "I won't learn it. You shall retain your superiority by my not knowing it."

—*The Life*. 1773, April 15th.

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS: "I do not perceive why the profession of a player should be despised; for the great and ultimate end of all the employments of mankind is to produce amusement. Garrick produces more amusement than anybody." BOSWELL: "You say, Dr. Johnson, that Garrick exhibits himself for a shilling. In this respect he is only on a footing with a lawyer who exhibits himself for his fee, and even will maintain any nonsense or absurdity, if the case require it. Garrick refuses a play or a part which he does not like: a lawyer never refuses." JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, what does this prove? only that a lawyer is worse. Boswell is now like Jack in the *Tale of a Tub*, who, when he is puzzled by an argument, hangs himself. He thinks I shall cut him down, but I'll let him hang" (laughing vociferously). SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS: "Mr. Boswell thinks that the profession of a lawyer being unquestionably honourable, if he can show the profession of a player to be more honourable, he proves his argument".

—*The Life*. 1773, April 29th.

Dr. Johnson and I had each an excellent bed-chamber. We had a dispute which of us had the best curtains. His were rather the best, being of linen; but I insisted that my bed had the best posts, which was undeniable. "Well," said he, "if you *have* the best *posts*, we will have you tied to them and whipped." I mention this slight circumstance, only to show how ready he is, even in mere trifles, to get the better of his antagonist, by placing him in a ludicrous view. I have known him sometimes use the same art, when hard pressed in serious disputation. Goldsmith, I remember, to retaliate for many a severe defeat which he has suffered from him, applied to him a lively saying in one of Cibber's comedies, which puts this part of his character in a strong light. "There is no arguing with Johnson; for, *if his pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt-end of it.*" —*The Tour.* 1773, Oct. 5th.

Professors Reid and Anderson, and the two Messieurs Foulis, the Elzevirs of Glasgow, dined and drank tea with us at our inn, after which the professors went away; and I, having a letter to write, left my fellow-traveller with Messieurs Foulis. Though good and ingenious men, they had that unsettled speculative mode of conversation which is offensive to a man regularly taught at an English school and university. I found that, instead of listening to the dictates of the Sage, they had teased him with questions and doubtful disputations. He came in a flutter to me, and desired I might

come back again, for he could not bear these men. "O ho! Sir," said I, "you are flying to me for refuge!" He never, in any situation, was at a loss for a ready repartee. He answered, with quick vivacity, "It is of two evils choosing the least." I was delighted with this flash bursting from the cloud which hung upon his mind, closed my letter directly, and joined the company.

We supped at Professor Anderson's. The general impression upon my memory is, that we had not much conversation at Glasgow, where the professors, like their brethren at Aberdeen, did not venture to expose themselves much to the battery of cannon which they knew might play upon them. Dr. Johnson, who was fully conscious of his own superior powers, afterwards praised Principal Robertson for his caution in this respect. He said to me, "Robertson, Sir, was in the right. Robertson is a man of eminence, and the head of a college at Edinburgh. He had a character to maintain, and did well not to risk its being lessened."

—*The Tour*. 1773, Oct. 29th.

Mr. Topham Beauclerk came in the evening, and he and Dr. Johnson and I stayed to supper. It was mentioned that Dr. Dodd had once wished to be a member of the LITERARY CLUB. JOHNSON: "I should be sorry if any of our club were hanged. I will not say but some of them deserve it." BEAUCLERK (supposing this to be aimed at persons for whom he had at that time a wonderful fancy, which, however, did not last

long) was irritated, and eagerly said: "You, Sir, have a friend (naming him) who deserves to be hanged; for he speaks behind their backs against those with whom he lives on the best terms, and attacks them in the newspapers. *He* certainly ought to be *kicked*." JOHNSON: "Sir, we all do this in some degree: '*Veniam petimus damusque vicissim*'. To be sure it may be done so much, that a man may deserve to be kicked." BEAUCLERK: "He is very malignant". JOHNSON: "No, Sir: he is not malignant. He is mischievous, if you will. He would do no man an essential injury; he may, indeed, love to make sport of people by vexing their vanity. I, however, once knew an old gentleman who was absolutely malignant. He really wished evil to others, and rejoiced at it." BOSWELL: "The gentleman, Mr. Beauclerk, against whom you are so violent, is I know, a man of good principles". BEAUCLERK: "Then he does not wear them out in practice".

—*The Life*. 1778, April 13th.

The gentleman who had dined with us at Dr. Percy's came in. Johnson attacked the Americans with intemperate vehemence of abuse. I said something in their favour; and added that I was always sorry when he talked on that subject. This, it seems, exasperated him, though he said nothing at the time. The cloud was charged with sulphurous vapour, which was afterwards to burst in thunder.—We talked of a gentleman who was running out his fortune in London; and I said, "We

must get him out of it. All his friends must quarrel with him, and that will soon drive him away." JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir, we'll send *you* to him. If your company does not drive a man out of his house, nothing will." This was a horrible shock, for which there was no visible cause. I afterwards asked him, why he had said so harsh a thing. JOHNSON: "Because, Sir, you made me angry about the Americans". BOSWELL: "But why did you not take your revenge directly?" JOHNSON (smiling): "Because, Sir, I had nothing ready. A man cannot strike till he has weapons." This was a candid and pleasant confession.
—*The Life*. 1778, April 17th.

It is well known that there was formerly a rude custom for those who were sailing upon the Thames to accost each other as they passed in the most abusive language they could invent, generally, however, with as much satirical humour as they were capable of producing. Addison gives a specimen of this ribaldry, in number 383 of *The Spectator*, when Sir Roger de Coverley and he are going to Spring Garden. Johnson was once eminently successful in this species of contest; a fellow having attacked him with some coarse raillery, Johnson answered him thus, "Sir, your wife, *under pretence of keeping a bawdy-house*, is a receiver of stolen goods". One evening when he and Mr. Burke and Mr. Langton were in company together, and the admirable scolding of Timon of Athens was mentioned, this instance of Johnson's was

quoted, and thought to have at least equal excellence.

—*The Life*. 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's *Johnsoniana*.

Johnson could not brook appearing to be worsted in argument, even when he had taken the wrong side, to show the force and dexterity of his talents. When, therefore, he perceived that his opponent gained ground, he had recourse to some sudden mode of robust sophistry. Once, when I was pressing upon him with visible advantage, he stopped me thus:—"My dear Boswell, let's have no more of this; you'll make nothing of it. I'd rather have you whistle a Scotch tune."

Care, however, must be taken to distinguish between Johnson when he "talked for victory", and Johnson when he had no desire but to inform and illustrate.—"One of Johnson's principal talents," says an eminent friend of his, "was shown in maintaining the wrong side of an argument, and in a splendid perversion of the truth. If you could contrive to have his fair opinion on a subject, and without any bias from personal prejudice, or from a wish to be victorious in argument, it was wisdom itself, not only convincing, but overpowering."

He had, however, all his life habituated himself to consider conversation as a trial of intellectual vigour and skill; and to this I think we may venture to ascribe that unexampled richness and brilliancy which appeared in his own. As a proof at once of his eagerness for colloquial

distinction, and his high notion of this eminent friend, he once addressed him thus:—"——, we now have been several hours together; and you have said but one thing for which I envied you." —*The Life.* 1781.

Johnson's dexterity in retort, when he seemed to be driven to an extremity by his adversary, was very remarkable. Of his power in this respect, our common friend, Mr. Windham, of Norfolk, has been pleased to furnish me with an eminent instance. However unfavourable to Scotland, he uniformly gave liberal praise to George Buchanan, as a writer. In a conversation concerning the literary merits of the two countries, in which Buchanan was introduced, a Scotchman, imagining that on this ground he should have an undoubted triumph over him, exclaimed, "Ah, Dr. Johnson, what would you have said of Buchanan, had he been an Englishman?"—"Why, Sir," said Johnson after a little pause, "I should *not* have said of Buchanan, had he been an *Englishman*, what I will now say of him as a *Scotchman*,—that he was the only man of genius his country ever produced."

And this brings to my recollection another instance of the same nature. I once reminded him that when Dr. Adam Smith was expatiating on the beauties of Glasgow, he had cut him short by saying, "Pray, Sir, have you ever seen Brentford?" and I took the liberty to add, "My dear Sir, surely that was *shocking*."—"Why, then, Sir," he replied, "you have never seen Brentford." —*The Life.* 1783.

A dull country magistrate gave Johnson a long tedious account of his exercising his criminal jurisdiction, the result of which was having sentenced four convicts to transportation. Johnson, in an agony of impatience to get rid of such a companion, exclaimed, "I heartily wish, Sir, that I were a fifth."

—*The Life*. 1784.

Johnson was present when a tragedy was read, in which there occurred this line:—

"Who rules o'er freemen should himself be free".

The company having admired it much—"I cannot agree with you," said Johnson; "it might as well be said,

"Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat".

—*The Life*. 1784.

/ Johnson having argued for some time with a pertinacious gentleman: his opponent, who had talked in a very puzzling manner, happened to say, "I don't understand you, Sir;" upon which Johnson observed, "Sir, I have found you an argument; but I am not obliged to find you an understanding."

—*The Life*. 1784.

- A foppish physician once reminded Johnson of his having been in company with him on a former occasion:—"I do not remember it, Sir." The physician still insisted; adding, that he that day wore so fine a coat that it must have attracted his notice. "Sir," said Johnson,

“had you been dipped in Pactolus, I should not have noticed you.”

—*The Life*. 1784.

A gentleman having said that a *conge d'elire* has not, perhaps, the force of a command, but may be considered only as a strong recommendation; — “Sir,” replied Johnson, who overheard him, “it is such a recommendation, as if I should throw you out of a two pair of stairs window, and recommend you to fall soft.”

One of the company provoked him greatly by doing what he could least of all bear, which was quoting something of his own writing, against what he then maintained. “What, Sir”, cried the gentleman, “do you say to

‘The busy day, the peaceful night,
Unfelt, uncounted, glided by’?”

Johnson finding himself thus presented as giving an instance of a man who had lived without uneasiness, was much offended; for he looked upon such a quotation as unfair. His anger burst out in an unjustifiable retort, insinuating that the gentleman’s remark was a sally of ebriety; “Sir, there is one passion I would advise you to command; when you have drunk out that glass, don’t drink another.” Here was exemplified what Goldsmith said of him, with the aid of a very witty image from one of Cibber’s comedies: “There is no arguing with Johnson; for if his pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt-end of it.”

Another was this: when a gentleman of eminence in the literary world was violently censured for attacking people by anonymous paragraphs in newspapers, he, from the spirit of contradiction as I thought, took up his defence, and said, "Come, come, this is not so terrible a crime; he means only to vex them a little. I do not say that I should do it; but there is a great difference between him and me; what is fit for Hephæstion is not fit for Alexander."—Another, when I told him that a young and handsome countess had said to me, "I should think that to be praised by Dr. Johnson would make one a fool all one's life;" and that I answered, "Madam, I shall make him a fool to-day, by repeating this to him;" he said, "I am too old to be made a fool; but if you say I am made a fool, I shall not deny it. I am much pleased with a compliment, especially from a pretty woman."

—*The Life.* 1784, May 15th.

HIS IRRITABILITY AND QUARRELS

He supped at the Crown and Anchor tavern, in the Strand, with a company whom I collected to meet him. They were Dr. Percy, now Bishop of Dromore, Dr. Douglas, now Bishop of Salisbury, Mr. Langton, Dr. Robertson, the historian, Dr. Hugh Blair, and Mr. Thomas Davies, who wished much to be introduced to these eminent Scotch literati; but on the present occasion he had very little opportunity of hearing them talk, for with an excess of

prudence, for which Johnson afterwards found fault with them, they hardly opened their lips, and that only to say something which they were certain would not expose them to the sword of Goliath: such was their anxiety for their fame when in the presence of Johnson. He was this evening in remarkable vigour of mind, and eager to exert himself in conversation, which he did with great readiness and fluency; but I am sorry to find that I have preserved but a small part of what passed.

He was vehement against old Dr. Mounsey, of Chelsea College, as "a fellow who swore and talked bawdy". "I have often been in his company," said Dr. Percy, "and never heard him swear or talk bawdy." Mr. Davies, who sat next to Dr. Percy, having after this had some conversation aside with him, made a discovery which, in his zeal to pay court to Dr. Johnson, he eagerly proclaimed aloud from the foot of the table: "Oh, Sir, I have found out a very good reason why Dr. Percy never heard Mounsey swear or talk bawdy, for he tells me he never saw him but at the Duke of Northumberland's table." "And so, Sir," said Dr. Johnson loudly to Dr. Percy, "you would shield this man from the charge of swearing and talking bawdy, because he did not do so at the Duke of Northumberland's table. Sir, you might as well tell us that you had seen him hold up his hand at the Old Bailey, and he neither swore nor talked bawdy; or that you had seen him in the cart at Tyburn, and he neither swore nor talked bawdy. And

is it thus, Sir, that you presume to controvert what I have related?" Dr. Johnson's animadversion was uttered in such a manner that Dr. Percy seemed to be displeased, and soon afterwards left the company, of which Johnson did not at that time take any notice.

Swift having been mentioned, Johnson, as usual, treated him with little respect as an author. Some of us endeavoured to support the Dean of St. Patrick's, by various arguments. One in particular praised his *Conduct of the Allies*. JOHNSON: "Sir, his *Conduct of the Allies* is a performance of very little ability". "Surely, Sir," said Dr. Douglas, "you must allow it has strong facts." JOHNSON: "Why, yes, Sir; but what is that to the merit of the composition? In the Sessions-paper of the Old Bailey there are strong facts. Housebreaking is a strong fact; robbery is a strong fact; and murder is a *mighty* strong fact; but is great praise due to the historian of those strong facts? No, Sir, Swift has told what he had to tell distinctly enough, but that is all. He had to count ten, and he has counted it right." —Then recollecting that Mr. Davies, by acting as an *informer*, had been the occasion of his talking somewhat too harshly to his friend Dr. Percy, for which, probably, when the first ebullition was over he felt some compunction, he took an opportunity to give him a hit: so added, with a preparatory laugh, "Why, Sir, Tom Davies might have written the *Conduct of the Allies*." Poor Tom being thus suddenly dragged into ludicrous notice in presence of the

Scottish Doctors, to whom he was ambitious of appearing to advantage, was grievously mortified. Nor did his punishment rest here; for upon subsequent occasions, whenever he, "statesman all o'er", assumed a strutting importance, I used to hail him "*The Author of the Conduct of the Allies*".

When I called upon Dr. Johnson next morning, I found him highly satisfied with his colloquial prowess the preceding evening. "Well," said he, "we had good talk." BOSWELL: "Yes, Sir, you tossed and gored several persons".

—*The Life*. 1768, June.

After dinner our conversation first turned upon Pope. Johnson said, his characters of men were admirably drawn, those of women not so well. He repeated to us, in his forcible melodious manner, the concluding lines of the *Dunciad*. While he was talking loudly in praise of those lines, one of the company ventured to say, "Too fine for such a poem: a poem on what?" JOHNSON (with a disdainful look): "Why, on *dunces*. It was worth while being a dunce then. Ah, Sir, hadst *thou* lived in those days! It is not worth while being a dunce now, when there are no wits." When Toplady was going to speak, Johnson uttered some sound which led Goldsmith to think that he was beginning again, and taking the words from Toplady. Upon which, he seized this opportunity of venting his own envy and spleen, under the pretext of supporting another person: "Sir," said he to Johnson, "the gentleman has

heard you patiently for an hour ; pray allow us now to hear him." JOHNSON (sternly): "Sir, I was not interrupting the gentleman. I was only giving him a signal of my attention. Sir, you are impertinent." Goldsmith made no reply, but continued in the company for some time.

He and Mr. Langton and I went together to the Club, where we found Mr. Burke, Mr. Garrick, and some other members, and amongst them our friend Goldsmith, who sat silently brooding over Johnson's reprimand to him after dinner. Johnson perceived this, and said aside to some of us, "I'll make Goldsmith forgive me;" and then called to him in a loud voice, "Dr. Goldsmith, something passed to-day where you and I dined; I ask your pardon." Goldsmith answered placidly, "It must be much from you, Sir, that I take ill." And so at once the difference was over, and they were on as easy terms as ever, and Goldsmith rattled away as usual.

—*The Life.* 1769, Oct. 16th.

After breakfast, Dr. Johnson and I, and Joseph mounted horses, and Col and the captain walked with us about a short mile across the island. We paid a visit to the Reverend Mr. Hector M'Lean. His parish consists of the islands of Col and Tyr-yi. He was about seventy-seven years of age, a decent ecclesiastic, dressed in a full suit of black clothes, and a black wig. He appeared like a Dutch pastor, or one of the assembly of divines at Westminster. Dr. Johnson observed to me after-

wards, "that he was a fine old man, and was as well-dressed, and had as much dignity in his appearance as the dean of a cathedral". We were told, that he had a valuable library, though but poor accommodation for it, being obliged to keep his books in large chests. It was curious to see him and Dr. Johnson together. Neither of them heard very distinctly; so each of them talked in his own way, and at the same time. Mr. M'Lean said, he had a confutation of Bayle, by Leibnitz. JOHNSON: "A confutation of Bayle, Sir! What part of Bayle do you mean? The greatest part of his writings is not confutable: it is historical and critical." Mr. M'Lean said, "the irreligious part"; and proceeded to talk of Leibnitz's controversy with Clarke, calling Leibnitz a great man. JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, Leibnitz persisted in affirming that Newton called space *sensorium numinis*, notwithstanding he was corrected, and desired to observe that Newton's words were *QUASI sensorium numinis*. No, Sir; Leibnitz was as paltry a fellow as I know. Out of respect to Queen Caroline, who patronized him, Clarke treated him too well."

During the time that Dr. Johnson was thus going on, the old minister was standing with his back to the fire, cresting up erect, pulling down the front of his periwig, and talking what a great man Leibnitz was. To give an idea of the scene, would require a page with two columns; but it ought rather to be represented by two good players. The old gentleman said, Clarke was very wicked, for going so

much into the Arian system. "I will not say he was wicked," said Dr. Johnson; "he might be mistaken." M'LEAN: "He was wicked, to shut his eyes against the Scriptures; and worthy men in England have since confuted him to all intents and purposes". JOHNSON: "I know not *who* has confuted him to *all intents and purposes*". Here again there was a double talking, each continuing to maintain his own argument, without hearing exactly what the other said.

I regretted that Dr. Johnson did not practise the art of accommodating himself to different sorts of people. Had he been softer with this venerable old man, we might have had more conversation; but his forcible spirit, and impetuosity of manner may be said to spare neither sex nor age. I have seen even Mrs. Thrale stunned; but I have often maintained, that it is better he should retain his own manner. Pliability of address I conceive to be inconsistent with that majestic power of mind which he possesses, and which produces such noble effects. A lofty oak will not bend like a supple willow.

He told me afterwards, he liked firmness in an old man, and was pleased to see Mr. M'Lean so orthodox. "At his age, it is too late for a man to be asking himself questions as to his belief."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Oct. 5th.

Books of Travels having been mentioned, Johnson praised Pennant very highly, as he did

at Dunvegan, in the Isle of Sky. Dr. Percy, knowing himself to be the heir male of the ancient Percys, and having the warmest and most dutiful attachment to the noble House of Northumberland, could not sit quietly and hear a man praised, who had spoken disrespectfully of Alnwick Castle, and the Duke's pleasure-grounds, especially as he thought meanly of his Travels. He therefore opposed Johnson eagerly. JOHNSON: "Pennant, in what he has said of Alnwick, has done what he intended; he has made you very angry". PERCY: "He has said, the garden is trim, which is representing it, like a citizen's parterre, when the truth is, there is a very large extent of fine turf and gravel walks". JOHNSON: "According to your own account, Sir, Pennant is right. It *is* trim. Here is grass cut close, and gravel rolled smooth. Is not that trim? The extent is nothing against that; a mile may be as trim as a square yard. Your extent puts me in mind of the citizen's enlarged dinner, two pieces of roast beef and two puddings. There is no variety, no mind exerted in laying out the ground, no trees." PERCY: "He pretends to give the natural history of Northumberland, and yet takes no notice of the immense number of trees planted there of late". JOHNSON: "That, Sir, has nothing to do with the *natural* history; that is *civil* history. A man who gives the natural history of the oak, is not to tell how many oaks have been planted in this place or that. A man who gives the natural history of the cow, is not to tell how many cows are milked at Islington.

The animal is the same, whether milked in the Park or at Islington." PERCY: "Pennant does not describe well; a carrier who goes along the side of Lochlomond would describe it better". JOHNSON: "I think he describes very well". PERCY: "I travelled after him". JOHNSON: "And *I* travelled after him". PERCY: "But, my good friend, you are short-sighted, and do not see so well as I do". I wondered at Dr. Percy's venturing thus. Dr. Johnson said nothing at the time; but inflammable particles were collecting for a cloud to burst. In a little while Dr. Percy said something more in disparagement of Pennant. JOHNSON (pointedly): "This is the resentment of a narrow mind, because he did not find everything in Northumberland". PERCY (feeling the stroke): "Sir, you may be as rude as you please". JOHNSON: "Hold, Sir! Don't talk of rudeness; remember, Sir, you told me (puffing hard with passion struggling for a vent) I was short-sighted. We have done with civility. We are to be as rude as we please." PERCY: "Upon my honour, Sir, I did not mean to be uncivil". JOHNSON: "I cannot say so, Sir; for I *did* mean to be uncivil, thinking *you* had been uncivil". Dr. Percy rose, ran up to him, and taking him by the hand, assured him affectionately that his meaning had been misunderstood; upon which a reconciliation instantly took place. JOHNSON: "My dear Sir, I am willing you shall *hang* Pennant". PERCY (resuming the former subject): "Pennant complains that the helmet is not hung out to invite to the hall of hospi-

tality. Now, I never heard that it was a custom to hang out a *helmet*." JOHNSON: "Hang him up, hang him up". BOSWELL (humouring the joke): "Hang out his skull instead of a helmet, and you may drink ale out of it in your hall of Odin, as he is your enemy; that will be truly ancient. *There will be Northern Antiquities*." JOHNSON: "He's a *Whig*, Sir; a *sad dog* (smiling at his own violent expressions, merely for *political* difference of opinion). But he's the best traveller I ever read; he observes more things than anyone else does."

—*The Life*. 1778, April 12th.

On Friday, April 16th, I had been present at the trial of the unfortunate Mr. Hackman, who, in a fit of frantic jealous love, had shot Miss Ray, the favourite of a nobleman. Johnson, in whose company I had dined to-day with some other friends, was much interested by my account of what passed, and particularly with his prayer for the mercy of heaven. He said, in a solemn fervid tone, "I hope he *shall* find mercy."

This day a violent altercation arose between Johnson and Beauclerk [at the Club], which having made much noise at the time, I think it proper, in order to prevent any future misrepresentation, to give a minute account of it.

In talking of Hackman, Johnson argued, as Judge Blackstone had done, that his being furnished with two pistols was a proof that he meant to shoot two persons. Mr. Beauclerk said, "No; for that every wise man who in-

tended to shoot himself took two pistols, that he might be sure of doing it at once. Lord ——'s cook shot himself with one pistol, and lived ten days in great agony. Mr. ——, who loved butter muffins, but durst not eat them because they disagreed with his stomach, resolved to shoot himself; and then he ate three buttered muffins for breakfast, before shooting himself, knowing that he should not be troubled with indigestion; *he* had two charged pistols; one was found lying charged upon the table by him, after he had shot himself with the other." "Well," said Johnson, with an air of triumph, "you see here one pistol was sufficient." Beauclerk replied smartly, "Because it happened to kill him." And either then or very little afterwards, being piqued at Johnson's triumphant remark, added, "This is what you don't know, and I do." There was then a cessation of the dispute; and some minutes intervened, during which dinner and the glass went on cheerfully; when Johnson suddenly and abruptly exclaimed, "Mr. Beauclerk, how came you to talk so petulantly to me, as, 'This is what you don't know, but what I know?' One thing I know, which *you* don't seem to know, that you are very uncivil." BEAUCLERK: "Because *you* began by being uncivil (which you always are)". The words in parenthesis were, I believe, not heard by Dr. Johnson. Here again there was a cessation of arms. Johnson told me that the reason why he waited at first some time without taking any notice of what Mr. Beauclerk said, was because

he was thinking whether he should resent it. But when he considered that there were present a young Lord and an eminent traveller, two men of the world with whom he had never dined before, he was apprehensive that they might think they had a right to take such liberties with him as Beauclerk did, and therefore resolved he would not let it pass; adding, "that he would not appear a coward". A little while after this, the conversation turned on the violence of Hackman's temper. Johnson then said, "It was his business to *command* his temper, as my friend Mr. Beauclerk should have done some time ago." BEAUCLERK: "I should learn of *you*, Sir". JOHNSON: "Sir, you have given *me* opportunities enough of learning, when I have been in *your* company. No man loves to be treated with contempt." BEAUCLERK (with a polite inclination toward Johnson): "Sir, you have known me twenty years, and however I may have treated others, you may be sure I could never treat you with contempt". JOHNSON: "Sir, you have said more than was necessary". Thus it ended; and Beauclerk's coach not having come for him till very late, Dr. Johnson and another gentleman sat with him a long time after the rest of the company were gone; and he and I dined at Beauclerk's on the Saturday se'nnight following.

—*The Life*. 1779, April 16th.

Johnson was, at a certain period of his life, a good deal with the Earl of Shelburne, now Marquis of Lansdowne, as he doubtless could

not but have a due value for that nobleman's activity of mind, and uncommon acquisitions of important knowledge, however much he might disapprove of other parts of his lordship's character, which were widely different from his own.

Morice Morgann, Esq., author of the very ingenious *Essay on the Character of Falstaff*, being a particular friend of his lordship, had once an opportunity of entertaining Johnson for a day or two at Wycombe, when this lord was absent, and by him I have been favoured with two anecdotes.

One is not a little to the credit of Johnson's candour. Mr. Morgann and he had a dispute pretty late at night, in which Johnson would not give up, though he had the wrong side, and, in short, both kept the field. Next morning, when they met in the breakfast-room, Dr. Johnson accosted Mr. Morgann thus: "Sir, I have been thinking on our dispute last night—you were in the right."

The other was as follows:—"Johnson, for sport perhaps, or from the spirit of contradiction, eagerly maintained that Derrick had merit as a writer. Mr. Morgann argued with him directly in vain. At length he had recourse to this device. "Pray, Sir," said he, "whether do you reckon Derrick or Smart the best poet?" Johnson at once felt himself roused, and answered, "Sir, there is no settling the point of precedency between a louse and a flea."

—*The Life*. 1783. Spring.

He entered upon a curious discussion of the

difference between intuition and sagacity; one being immediate in its effect, the other requiring a circuitous process; one, he observed, was the *eye* of the mind, the other the *nose* of the mind.

A young gentleman present took up the argument against him, and maintained that no man ever thinks of the *nose of the mind*, not adverting that though that figurative sense seems strange to us, as very unusual, it is truly not more forced than Hamlet's "In my *mind's eye*, Horatio". He persisted much too long, and appeared to Johnson as putting himself forward as his antagonist with too much presumption: upon which he called to him, in a loud tone, "What is it you are contending for, if you *be* contending?"—And afterwards imagining that the gentleman retorted upon him with a kind of smart drollery, he said, "Mr. —, it does not become you to talk so to me. Besides, ridicule is not your talent; you have *there* neither intuition nor sagacity."—The gentleman protested that he had intended no improper freedom, but had the greatest respect for Dr. Johnson. After a short pause, during which we were somewhat uneasy;—JOHNSON: "Give me your hand, Sir. You were too tedious, and I was too short." MR. —: "Sir, I am honoured by your attention in any way". JOHNSON: "Come, Sir, let's have no more of it. We offended one another by our contention; let us not offend the company by our compliments."

—*The Life*. 1784, June 27th.

The Fear of Death

I mentioned to him that I had seen the execution of several convicts at Tyburn, two days before, and that none of them seemed to be under any concern. JOHNSON: "Most of them, Sir, have never thought at all". BOSWELL: "But is not the fear of death natural to man?" JOHNSON: "So much so, Sir, that the whole of life is but keeping away the thoughts of it". He then, in a low and earnest tone, talked of his meditating upon the awful hour of his own dissolution, and in what manner he should conduct himself upon that occasion: "I know not," said he, "whether I should wish to have a friend by me, or have it all between God and myself." —*The Life.* 1769, Oct. 19th.

When we were alone, I introduced the subject of death, and endeavoured to maintain that the fear of it might be got over. I told him that David Hume said to me, he was no more uneasy to think he should *not be* after his life, than that he *had not been* before he began to exist. JOHNSON: "Sir, if he really thinks so, his perceptions are disturbed; he is mad. If he does not think so, he lies. He may tell you he holds his finger in the flame of

a candle, without feeling pain; would you believe him? When he dies, he at least gives up all he has." BOSWELL: "Foote, Sir, told me, that when he was very ill he was not afraid to die". JOHNSON: "It is not true, Sir. Hold a pistol to Foote's breast, or to Hume's breast, and threaten to kill them, and you'll see how they behave." BOSWELL: "But may we not fortify our minds for the approach of death?"—Here I am sensible I was in the wrong, to bring before his view what he ever looked upon with horror; for although when in a celestial frame of mind in his *Vanity of Human Wishes*, he has supposed death to be "kind Nature's signal for retreat", from this state of being to "a happier seat", his thoughts upon this awful change were in general full of dismal apprehensions. His mind resembled the vast amphitheatre, the Coliseum at Rome. In the centre stood his judgment, which, like a mighty gladiator, combatted those apprehensions that, like the wild beasts of the *Arena*, were all around in cells, ready to be let out upon him. After a conflict, he drives them back into their dens; but not killing them, they were still assailing him. To my question, whether we might not fortify our minds for the approach of death, he answered, in a passion, "No, Sir, let it alone. It matters not how a man dies, but how he lives. The act of dying is not of importance, it lasts so short a time." He added (with an earnest look), "A man knows it must be so, and submits. It will do him no good to whine."

I attempted to continue the conversation. He was so provoked that he said: "Give us no more of this:" and was thrown into such a state of agitation, that he expressed himself in a way that alarmed and distressed me; showed an impatience that I should leave him, and when I was going away, called to me sternly, "Don't let us meet to-morrow."

—*The Life.* 1769, Oct. 26th.

We spoke of death. Dr. Johnson on this subject observed, that the boastings of some men, as to dying easily, were idle talk, proceeding from partial views. I mentioned Hawthornden's *Cypress-grove*, where it is said that the world is a mere show; and that it is unreasonable for a man to wish to continue in the show-room, after he has seen it. Let him go cheerfully out, and give place to other spectators. JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, if he is sure he is to be well, after he goes out of it. But if he is to grow blind after he goes out of the show-room, and never to see anything again; or if he does not know whither he is to go next, a man will not go cheerfully out of a show-room. No wise man will be contented to die, if he thinks he is to go into a state of punishment. Nay, no wise man will be contented to die, if he thinks he is to fall into annihilation: for however unhappy any man's existence may be, he yet would rather have it, than not exist at all. No, there is no rational principle by which a man can die contented, but a trust in the mercy of God, through the merits of

JESUS CHRIST." This short sermon, delivered with an earnest tone, in a boat upon the sea, which was perfectly calm, on a day appropriated to religious worship, while everyone listened with an air of satisfaction, had a most pleasing effect upon my mind.

Pursuing the same train of serious reflection, he added, that it seemed certain that happiness could not be found in this life, because so many had tried to find it, in such a variety of ways, and had not found it.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 12th.

While we were chatting in the indolent style of men who were to stay here all this day at least, we were suddenly roused at being told that the wind was fair, that a little fleet of herring-busses was passing by for Mull, and that Mr. Simpson's vessel was about to sail. Hugh M'Donald, the skipper, came to us, and was impatient that we should get ready, which we soon did. Dr. Johnson, with composure and solemnity, repeated the observation of Epictetus, that, "as man has the voyage of death before him,—whatever may be his employment, he should be ready at the Master's call; and an old man should never be far from the shore, lest he should not be able to get himself ready". —*The Tour.* 1773, Oct. 3rd.

Let me now go back, and glean *Johnsoniana*. The Saturday before we sailed from Slate, I sat awhile in the afternoon with Dr. Johnson in his room, in a quiet serious frame. I observed,

that hardly any man was accurately prepared for dying; but almost every one left something undone, something in confusion; that my father, indeed, told me he knew one man (Carlisle of Limekilns) after whose death all his papers were found in exact order; and nothing was omitted in his will. JOHNSON: "Sir, I had an uncle who died so; but such attention requires great leisure, and great firmness of mind. If one was to think constantly of death, the business of life would stand still. I am no friend to making religion appear too hard. Many good people have done harm, by giving severe notions of it. In the same way, as to learning: I never frighten young people with difficulties; on the contrary, I tell them that they may very easily get as much as will do very well. I do not indeed tell them that they will be *Bentleys*."

—*The Tour*. 1773, Oct. 15th.

As I wandered with my reverend friend in the groves of Auchinleck I told him that, if I survived him, it was my intention to erect a monument to him here, among scenes which, in my mind, were all classical; for in my youth I had appropriated to them many of the descriptions of the Roman poets. He could not bear to have death presented to him in any shape; for his constitutional melancholy made the king of terrors more frightful. He turned off the subject, saying, "Sir, I hope to see your grandchildren!"

—*The Tour*. 1773, Nov. 4th.

At Dr. Webster's, he said, that he believed hardly any man died without affectation. This remark appears to me to be well founded, and will account for many of the celebrated death-bed sayings which are recorded.

—*The Tour.* 1773, November

Mr. Macpherson little knew the character of Dr. Johnson, if he supposed that he could be easily intimidated: for no man was ever more remarkable for personal courage. He had, indeed, an awful dread of death, or rather, "of something after death"; and what rational man, who seriously thinks of quitting all that he has ever known, and going into a new and unknown state of being, can be without that dread? But his fear was from reflection; his courage natural. His fear, in that one instance, was the result of philosophical and religious consideration. He feared death, but he feared nothing else, not even what might occasion death.

—*The Life.* 1775.

I mentioned to Dr. Johnson, that David Hume's persisting in his infidelity, when he was dying, shocked me much. JOHNSON: "Why should it shock you, Sir? Hume owned he had never read the Testament with attention. Here then was a man who had been at no pains to enquire into the truth of religion, and had continually turned his mind the other way. It was not to be expected that the prospect of death would alter his way of thinking, unless God should send an angel to set him right."

I said I had reason to believe that the thought of annihilation gave Hume no pain. JOHNSON: "It was not so, Sir. He had a vanity in being thought easy. It is more probable that he should assume an appearance of ease, than so very improbable a thing should be, as a man not afraid of going (as, in spite of his delusive theory, he cannot be sure but he may go) into an unknown state, and not being uneasy at leaving all he knew. And you are to consider that, upon his own principle of annihilation, he had no motive to speak the truth." The horror of death, which I had always observed in Dr. Johnson, appeared strong to-night. I ventured to tell him that I had been for moments in my life not afraid of death; therefore I could suppose another man in that state of mind for a considerable space of time. He said, "He never had a moment in which death was not terrible to him." He added, that it had been observed, that scarce any man dies in public but with apparent resolution; from that desire of praise which never quits us. I said, Dr. Dodd seemed willing to die, and full of hopes of happiness. "Sir," said he, "Dr. Dodd would have given both his hands and both his legs to have lived. The better a man is, the more he is afraid of death, having a clearer view of infinite purity." He owned, that our being in an unhappy uncertainty as to our salvation was mysterious; and said, "Ah! we must wait till we are in another state of being to have many things explained to us." Even the powerful mind of Johnson seemed foiled by

futurity. But I thought that the gloom of uncertainty in solemn religious speculation, being mingled with hope, was yet more consolatory than the emptiness of infidelity. A man can live in thick air, but perishes in an exhausted receiver.

Dr. Johnson was much pleased with a remark which I told him was made to me by General Paoli:—"That it is impossible not to be afraid of death; and that those who at the time of dying are not afraid, are not thinking of death, but of applause, or something else, which keeps death out of their sight: so that all men are equally afraid of death when they see it; only some have a power of turning their sight away from it better than others".

—*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 16th.

Some ladies, who had been present yesterday when I mentioned his birthday, came to dinner to-day, and plagued him unintentionally by wishing him joy. I know not why he disliked having his birthday mentioned, unless it were that it reminded him of his approaching nearer to death, of which he had a constant dread.

I mentioned to him a friend of mine who was formerly gloomy from low spirits, and much distressed by the fear of death, but was now uniformly placid, and contemplated his dissolution without any perturbation. "Sir," said Johnson, "this is only a disordered imagination taking a different turn."

—*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 19th.

I expressed a horror at the thought of death. MRS. KNOWLES: "Nay, thou should'st not have a horror for what is the gate of life". JOHNSON (standing upon the hearth rolling about, with a serious, solemn, and somewhat gloomy air): "No rational man can die without uneasy apprehension". MRS. KNOWLES: "The Scriptures tell us, 'The righteous shall have *hope* in his death'". JOHNSON: "Yes, Madam, that is, he shall not have despair. But, consider his hope of salvation must be founded on the terms on which it is promised that the mediation of our SAVIOUR shall be applied to us,—namely, obedience; and where obedience has failed, then, as suppletory to it, repentance. But what man can say that his obedience has been such as he would approve of in another, or even in himself upon close examination, or that his repentance has not been such as to require being repented of? No man can be sure that his obedience and repentance will obtain salvation." MRS. KNOWLES: "But divine intimation of acceptance may be made to the soul". JOHNSON: "Madam, it may; but I should not think the better of a man who should tell me, on his death-bed, he was sure of salvation. A man cannot be sure himself that he has divine intimation of acceptance; much less can he make others sure that he has it." BOSWELL: "Then, Sir, we must be contented to acknowledge that death is a terrible thing". JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir. I have made no approaches to a state which can look on it as not terrible." MRS. KNOWLES (seeming to

enjoy a pleasing serenity in the persuasion of benignant divine light): "Does not St. Paul say, 'I have fought the good fight of faith, I have finished my course; henceforth is laid up for me a crown of life'?" JOHNSON: "Yes, Madam; but here was a man inspired, a man who had been converted by supernatural interposition". BOSWELL: "In prospect death is dreadful; but in fact we find that people die easy". JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, most people have not *thought* much of the matter, so cannot *say* much, and it is supposed they die easy. Few believe it certain they are then to die; and those who do, set themselves to behave with resolution, as a man does who is going to be hanged:—he is not the less unwilling to be hanged." MISS SEWARD: "There is one mode of the fear of death, which is certainly absurd: and that is the dread of annihilation, which is only a pleasing sleep without a dream". JOHNSON: "It is neither pleasing nor sleep; it is nothing. Now mere existence is so much better than nothing, that one would rather exist even in pain, than not exist." BOSWELL: "If annihilation be nothing, then existing in pain is not a comparative state, but is a positive evil, which I cannot think we should choose. I must be allowed to differ here; and it would lessen the hope of a future state founded on the argument, that the Supreme Being, who is good as he is great, will hereafter compensate for our present sufferings in this life. For if existence, such as we have it here, be comparatively a good, we have no reason to complain, though

no more of it should be given to us. But if our only state of existence were in this world, then we might with some reason complain that we are so dissatisfied with our enjoyments compared with our desires." JOHNSON: "The lady confounds annihilation, which is nothing, with the apprehension of it, which is dreadful. It is in the apprehension of it that the horror of annihilation consists."

—*The Life*. 1778, April 15th.

Having fallen into a very serious frame of mind, in which mutual expressions of kindness passed between us, such as would be thought too vain in me to repeat, I talked with regret of the sad inevitable certainty that one of us must survive the other. JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, that is an affecting consideration. I remember Swift, in one of his letters to Pope, says, 'I intend to come over, that we may meet once more; and when we must part, it is what happens to all human beings'." BOSWELL: "The hope that we shall see our departed friends again must support the mind". JOHNSON: "Why yes, Sir". BOSWELL: "There is a strange unwillingness to part with life, independent of serious fears as to futurity. A reverend friend of ours (naming him) tells me, that he feels an uneasiness at the thoughts of leaving his house, his study, his books." JOHNSON: "This is foolish in ——. A man need not be uneasy on these grounds; for, as he will retain his consciousness, he may say with the philosopher, *Omnia mea mecum porto*." Bos-

WELL: "True, Sir; we may carry our books in our heads; but still there is something painful in the thought of leaving for ever what has given us pleasure".

—*The Life*. 1778, April 17th.

A clergyman at Bath wrote to him, that in *The Morning Chronicle*, a passage in *The Beauties of Johnson*, article Death, had been pointed out as supposed by some readers to recommend suicide, the words being, "To die is the fate of man; but to die with lingering anguish is generally his folly"; and respectfully suggesting to him, that such an erroneous notion of any sentence in the writings of an acknowledged friend of religion and virtue, should not pass uncontradicted.

Johnson thus answered the clergyman's letter:

"TO THE REVEREND MR. ———, AT BATH

"May 15, 1782.

"SIR,

"Being now in the country in a state of recovery, as I hope, from a very oppressive disorder, I cannot neglect the acknowledgment of your Christian letter. The Book called *The Beauties of Johnson*, is the production of I know not whom: I never saw it but by casual inspection, and considered myself as utterly disengaged from its consequences. Of the passage you mention, I remember some notice in some paper, but knowing that it must be misrepresented, I thought of it no more, nor do I know

where to find it in my own books. I am accustomed to think little of newspapers; but an opinion so weighty and serious as yours has determined me to do, what I should, without your seasonable admonition, have omitted; and I will direct my thought to be shown in its true state. If I could find the passage I would direct you to it. I suppose the tenor is this:—‘Acute diseases are the immediate and inevitable strokes of Heaven; but of them the pain is short, and the conclusion speedy; chronical disorders, by which we are suspended in tedious torture between life and death, are commonly the effect of our own misconduct and intemperance. To die, &c.’ This, Sir, you see, is all true and all blameless. I hope some time in the next week to have all rectified. My health has been lately much shaken; if you favour me with any answer, it will be a comfort to me to know that I have your prayers. I am, &c.,

“SAM. JOHNSON.”

This letter, as might be expected, had its full effect, and the clergyman acknowledged it in grateful and pious terms.

—*The Life*. 1782, May 15th.

SEWARD: “I wonder that there should be people without religion”. JOHNSON: “Sir, you need not wonder at this, when you consider how large a proportion of almost every man’s life is passed without thinking of it. I myself was for some years totally regardless of religion.”

It had dropped out of my mind. It was at an early part of my life. Sickness brought it back, and I hope I have never lost it since."

BOSWELL: "My dear Sir, what a man must you have been without religion! Why you must have gone on drinking, and swearing, and—" JOHNSON (with a smile): "I drank enough and swore enough to be sure".

SEWARD: "One should think that sickness, and the view of death, would make more men religious". JOHNSON: "Sir, they do not know how to go about it: they have not the first notion. A man who has never had religion before, no more grows religious when he is sick, than a man who has never learned figures can count when he has need of calculation."

—*The Life*. 1783, April 28th.

"TO JAMES BOSWELL, ESQ.

"*Feb.* 11, 1784.

"DEAR SIR,

"I hear of many enquiries which your kindness has disposed you to make after me. I have long intended you a long letter, which perhaps the imagination of its length hindered me from beginning. I will, therefore, content myself with a shorter.

"Having promoted the institution of a new Club in the neighbourhood, at the house of an old servant of Thrale's, I went thither to meet the company, and was seized with a spasmodic asthma, so violent, that with difficulty I got to my own house, in which I have been confined

eight or nine weeks, and from which I know not when I shall be able to go even to church. The asthma, however, is not the worst. A dropsy gains ground upon me; my legs and thighs are very much swollen with water, which I should be content if I could keep there, but I am afraid that it will soon be higher. My nights are very sleepless and very tedious. And yet I am extremely afraid of dying.

“My physicians try to make me hope, that much of my malady is the effect of cold, and that some degree at least of recovery is to be expected from vernal breezes and summer suns. If my life is prolonged to autumn, I should be glad to try a warmer climate; though how to travel with a diseased body, without a companion to conduct me, and with very little money, I do not well see. Ramsay has recovered his limbs in Italy; and Fielding was sent to Lisbon, where, indeed, he died; but he was, I believe, past hope when he went. Think for me what I can do.

“I received your pamphlet, and when I write again may perhaps tell you some opinion about it; but you will forgive a man struggling with disease his neglect of disputes, politics, and pamphlets. Let me have your prayers. My compliments to your lady, and young ones. Ask your physicians about my case: and desire Sir Alexander Dick to write me his opinion. I am, dear Sir, &c.,

“SAM. JOHNSON.”
—*The Life*. 1784, Feb. 11th.

“ TO MRS. LUCY PORTER, IN LICHFIELD

“ *February 23, 1784.*

“ MY DEAREST LOVE,

“ I have been extremely ill of an asthma and dropsy, but received, by the mercy of God, sudden and unexpected relief last Thursday, by the discharge of twenty pints of water. Whether I shall continue free, or shall fill again, cannot be told. Pray for me.

“ Death, my dear, is very dreadful; let us think nothing worth our care but how to prepare for it; what we know amiss in ourselves let us make haste to amend, and put our trust in the mercy of God, and the intercession of our SAVIOUR.

“ I am, dear Madam,

“ Your most humble servant,

“ SAM. JOHNSON.”

“ TO THE REV. DR. TAYLOR, ASHBOURNE,
DERBYSHIRE

“ *London, Easter Monday,*

“ *April 12, 1784.*

“ DEAR SIR,

“ What can be the reason that I hear nothing from you? I hope nothing disables you from writing. What I have seen, and what I have felt, gives me reason to fear everything. Do not omit giving me the comfort of knowing, that after all my losses I have yet a friend left.

“ I want every comfort. My life is very solitary and very cheerless. Though it has

pleased God wonderfully to deliver me from the dropsy, I am yet very weak, and have not passed the door since the 13th of December. I hope for some help from warm weather, which will surely come in time.

“I could not have the consent of the physicians to go to church yesterday: I therefore received the holy sacrament at home, in the room where I communicated with dear Mrs. Williams, a little before her death. O my friend, the approach of death is very dreadful. I am afraid to think on that which I know I cannot avoid. It is vain to look round and round for that help which cannot be had. Yet we hope and hope, and fancy that he who has lived to-day may live to-morrow. But let us learn to derive our hope only from God.

“In the meantime let us be kind to one another. I have no friend now living but you, and Mr. Hector, that was the friend of my youth. Do not neglect, dear Sir, yours affectionately,

“SAM. JOHNSON.”

—*The Life*. 1784, April 12th.

Johnson, talking of the fear of death, said, “Some people are not afraid, because they look upon salvation as the effect of an absolute decree, and think they feel in themselves the marks of sanctification. Others, and those the most rational in my opinion, look upon salvation as conditional: and, as they never can be sure that they have complied with the conditions, they are afraid.”

—*The Life*. 1784, May 16th.

On Wednesday, May 19, I sat a part of the evening with him, by ourselves. I observed, that the death of our friends might be a consolation against the fear of our own dissolution, because we might have more friends in the other world than in this. He perhaps felt this as a reflection upon his apprehension as to death; and said, with heat, "How can a man know *where* his departed friends are, or whether they will be his friends in the other world? How many friendships have you known formed upon principles of virtue? Most friendships are formed by caprice or by chance, mere confederacies in vice or leagues in folly."

—*The Life*. 1784, May 19th.

I have no note of this evening's conversation, except a single fragment. When I mentioned 'Thomas Lord Lyttelton's vision, the prediction of the time of his death and its exact fulfilment;—JOHNSON: "It is the most extraordinary thing that has happened in my day. I heard it with my own ears, from his uncle, Lord Westcote. I am so glad to have every evidence of the spiritual world, that I am willing to believe it." DR. ADAMS: "You have evidence enough; good evidence, which needs not much support". JOHNSON: "I like to have more".

Mr. Henderson, with whom I had sauntered in the venerable walks of Merton College, and found him a very learned and pious man, supped with us. Dr. Johnson surprised him not a little, by acknowledging, with a look of horror, that he was much oppressed by the fear of

death. The amiable Dr. Adams suggested that God was infinitely good. JOHNSON: "That he is infinitely good, as far as the perfection of his nature will allow, I certainly believe; but it is necessary for good upon the whole, that individuals should be punished. As to an *individual*, therefore, he is not infinitely good; and as I cannot be *sure* that I have fulfilled the conditions on which salvation is granted, I am afraid I may be one of those who shall be damned." (Looking dismally.) DR. ADAMS: "What do you mean by damned?" JOHNSON (passionately and loudly): "Sent to hell, Sir, and punished everlastingly". DR. ADAMS: "I don't believe that doctrine". JOHNSON: "Hold, Sir; do you believe that some will be punished at all?" DR. ADAMS: "Being excluded from heaven will be a punishment; yet there may be no great positive suffering". JOHNSON: "Well, Sir, but if you admit any degree of punishment, there is an end of your argument for infinite goodness simply considered; for infinite goodness would inflict no punishment whatever. There is no infinite goodness physically considered; morally there is." BOSWELL: "But may not a man attain to such a degree of hope as not to be uneasy from the fear of death?" JOHNSON: "A man may have such a degree of hope as to keep him quiet. You see I am not quiet, from the vehemence with which I talk; but I do not despair." MRS. ADAMS: "You seem, Sir, to forget the merits of our Redeemer". JOHNSON: "Madam, I do not forget the merits of my Redeemer;

but my Redeemer has said that he will set some on his right hand and some on his left". —He was in gloomy agitation, and said, "I'll have no more on't."—If what has now been stated should be urged by the enemies of Christianity, as if its influence on the mind were not benignant, let it be remembered, that Johnson's temperament was melancholy, of which such direful apprehensions of futurity are often a common effect. We shall presently see, that when he approached nearer to his awful change, his mind became tranquil, and he exhibited as much fortitude as becomes a thinking man in that situation.

—*The Life.* 1784, June 12th.

"I have lost dear Mr. Allen; and wherever I turn, the dead or the dying meet my notice, and force my attention upon misery and mortality. Mrs. Burney's escape from so much danger, and her ease after so much pain, throws, however, some radiance of hope upon the gloomy prospect. May her recovery be perfect, and her continuance long. I struggle hard for life. I take physic, and take air; my friend's chariot is always ready. We have run this morning twenty-four miles, and could run forty-eight more. *But who can run the race with death?*"

—*The Life.* 1784, Aug. 2nd.

"On which side soever I turn, mortality presents its formidable frown. I left three old friends at Lichfield, when I was last there, and now found them all dead. I no sooner lost

sight of dear Allen, than I am told that I shall see him no more. That we must all die, we always knew; I wish I had sooner remembered it. Do not think me intrusive or importunate, if I now call, dear Sir, upon you to remember it.”

—*The Life*. 1784, Aug. 19th.

Death had always been to him an object of terror; so that, though by no means happy, he still clung to life with an eagerness at which many have wondered. At any time when he was ill, he was very much pleased to be told that he looked better. An ingenious member of the *Eumelian Club* informs me, that upon one occasion, when he said to him that he saw health returning to his cheek, Johnson seized him by the hand and exclaimed, “Sir, you are one of the kindest friends I ever had”.

His own state of his views of futurity will appear truly rational; and may, perhaps, impress the unthinking with seriousness.

“You know,” says he, “I never thought confidence with respect to futurity, any part of the character of a brave, a wise, or a good man. Bravery has no place where it can avail nothing; wisdom impresses strongly the consciousness of those faults, of which it is, perhaps, itself, an aggravation; and goodness, always wishing to be better, and imputing every deficiency to criminal negligence, and every fault to voluntary corruption, never dares to suppose the condition of forgiveness fulfilled, nor what is wanting in the crime supplied by penitence.

“This is the state of the best; but what

must be the condition of him whose heart will not suffer him to rank himself among the best, or among the good?—Such must be his dread of the approaching trial, as will leave him little attention to the opinion of those whom he is leaving for ever; and the serenity that is not felt, it can be no virtue to feign.”

—*The Life*. 1784.

Johnson's Prejudice against the Scots

We find in Johnson's *London* the most spirited invectives against tyranny and oppression, the warmest predilection for his own country, and the purest love of virtue; interspersed with traits of his own particular character and situation, not omitting his prejudices as a "true-born Englishman" not only against foreign countries, but against Ireland and Scotland.

—*The Life.* 1738.

The public has had, from another pen, a long detail of what had been done in this country by prior lexicographers; and no doubt Johnson was wise to avail himself of them, so far as they went: but the learned yet judicious research of etymology, the various yet accurate display of definition, and the rich collection of authorities were reserved for the superior mind of our great philologist. For the mechanical part he employed, as he told me, six amanuenses; and let it be remembered by the natives of North Britain, to whom he is supposed to have been so hostile, that five of them were of that country. There were two Messieurs

Macbean; Mr. Shiels, who, we shall hereafter see, partly wrote the *Lives of the Poets* to which the name of Cibber is affixed; Mr. Stewart, son of Mr. George Stewart, bookseller at Edinburgh; and a Mr. Maitland. The sixth of these humble assistants was Mr. Peyton, who, I believe, taught French, and published some elementary tracts.

To all these painful labourers Johnson showed a never-ceasing kindness, so far as they stood in need of it. The elder Mr. Macbean had afterwards the honour of being librarian to Archibald Duke of Argyle, for many years, but was left without a shilling. Johnson wrote for him a Preface to *A System of Ancient Geography*; and, by the favour of Lord Thurlow, got him admitted a poor brother of the Charterhouse. For Shiels, who died of a consumption, he had much tenderness; and it has been thought that some choice sentences in the *Lives of the Poets* were supplied by him. Peyton, when reduced to penury, had frequent aid from the bounty of Johnson, who at last was at the expense of burying him and his wife.

—*The Life.* 1747.

“You know that we have a new King and a new Parliament. Of the new Parliament Fitzherbert is a member. We were so weary of our old King, that we are much pleased with his successor; of whom we are so much inclined to hope great things, that most of us begin already to believe them. The young man is hitherto blameless; but it would be unreason-

able to expect much from the immaturity of juvenile years, and the ignorance of princely education. He has been long in the hands of the Scots, and has already favoured them more than the English will contentedly endure. But, perhaps, he scarcely knows whom he has distinguished, or whom he has disgusted."

—*The Life*. 1761, June 10th.

At last, on Monday, the 16th of May, when I was sitting in Mr. Davies's back-parlour, after having drunk tea with him and Mrs. Davies, Johnson unexpectedly came into the shop; and Mr. Davies having perceived him, through the glass-door in the room in which we were sitting, advancing towards us,—he announced his awful approach to me, somewhat in the manner of an actor in the part of *Horatio*, when he addresses *Hamlet* on the appearance of his father's ghost, "Look, my Lord, it comes!" I found that I had a very perfect idea of Johnson's figure, from the portrait of him painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds soon after he had published his Dictionary, in the attitude of sitting in his easy chair in deep meditation; which was the first picture his friend did for him, which Sir Joshua very kindly presented to me. Mr. Davies mentioned my name, and respectfully introduced me to him. I was much agitated; and recollecting his prejudice against the Scotch, of which I had heard much, I said to Davies, "Don't tell where I come from."—"From Scotland," cried Davies, roguishly. "Mr. Johnson," said I, "I do indeed come from

Scotland, but I cannot help it." I am willing to flatter myself that I meant this as light pleasantry to soothe and conciliate him, and not as an humiliating abasement at the expense of my country. But however that might be, this speech was somewhat unlucky; for with that quickness of wit for which he was so remarkable, he seized the expression, "come from Scotland", which I used in the sense of being of that country; and, as if I had said that I had come away from it, or left it, retorted, "That, Sir, I find, is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help." This stroke stunned me a good deal; and when we had sat down, I felt myself not a little embarrassed, and apprehensive of what might come next.

—*The Life*. 1763, May 16th.

Mr. Ogilvie was unlucky enough to choose for the topic of his conversation the praises of his native country. He began with saying that there was very rich land around Edinburgh. Goldsmith, who had studied physic there, contradicted this, very untruly, with a sneering laugh. Disconcerted a little by this, Mr. Ogilvie then took a new ground, where, I suppose, he thought himself perfectly safe; for he observed, that Scotland had a great many noble wild prospects. JOHNSON: "I believe, Sir, you have a great many. Norway, too, has noble wild prospects; and Lapland is remarkable for prodigious noble wild prospects. But, Sir, let me tell you, the noblest prospect which a Scotchman ever sees, is the highroad that

leads him to England!" This unexpected and pointed sally produced a roar of applause. After all, however, those who admire the rude grandeur of nature cannot deny it to Caledonia.

— *The Life.* 1763, July 6th.

His prejudice against Scotland appeared remarkably strong at this time. When I talked of our advancement in literature, "Sir," said he, "you have learnt a little from us, and you think yourselves very great men. Hume would never have written history had not Voltaire written it before him. He is an echo of Voltaire." BOSWELL: "But, Sir, we have Lord Kames". JOHNSON: "You *have* Lord Kames. Keep him; ha, ha, ha! We don't envy you him. Do you ever see Dr. Robertson?" BOSWELL: "Yes, Sir". JOHNSON: "Does the dog talk of me?" BOSWELL: "Indeed, Sir, he does, and loves you". Thinking that I now had him in a corner, and being solicitous for the literary fame of my country, I pressed him for his opinion on the merit of Dr. Robertson's *History of Scotland*. But to my surprise, he escaped. "Sir, I love Robertson, and I won't talk of his book."

It is but justice both to him and Dr. Robertson to add, that though he indulged himself in this sally of wit, he had too good taste not to be fully sensible of the merits of that admirable work.

— *The Life.* 1763, Spring.

I told him that David Hume had made a

short collection of Scotticisms. "I wonder," said Johnson, "that *he* should find them."

—*The Life*. 1769, September.

He played off his wit against Scotland with a good-humoured pleasantry, which gave me, though no bigot to national prejudices, an opportunity for a little contest with him. I having said that England was obliged to us for gardeners, almost all their good gardeners being Scotchmen—JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, that is because gardening is much more necessary amongst you than with us, which makes so many of your people learn it. It is *all* gardening with you. Things which grow wild here, must be cultivated with great care in Scotland. Pray, now," throwing himself back in his chair, and laughing, "are you ever able to bring the *sloe* to perfection?"

I boasted that we had the honour of being the first to abolish the unhospitable, troublesome, and ungracious custom of giving veils to servants. JOHNSON: "Sir, you abolished veils because you were too poor to be able to give them."

—*The Life*. 1769, Oct. 6th.

On Thursday, October 19, I passed the evening with him at his house. He advised me to complete a Dictionary of words peculiar to Scotland, of which I showed him a specimen. "Sir," said he, "Ray has made a collection of north country words. By collecting those of your country, you will do a useful thing towards the history of the language." He bade me

also go on with collections which I was making upon the antiquities of Scotland. "Make a large book—a folio." BOSWELL: "But of what use will it be, Sir?" JOHNSON: "Never mind the use; do it". —*The Life*. 1769, Oct. 19th.

Dr. Johnson was often accused of prejudices, nay, antipathy, with regard to the natives of Scotland. Surely, so illiberal a prejudice never entered his mind: and, it is well known, many natives of that respectable country possessed a large share in his esteem; nor were any of them ever excluded from his good offices as far as opportunity permitted. True it is, he considered the Scotch, nationally, as a crafty, designing people, eagerly attentive to their own interest, and too apt to overlook the claims and pretensions of other people. "While they confine their benevolence, in a manner, exclusively to those of their own country, they expect to share in the good offices of other people. Now," said Johnson, "this principle is either right or wrong; if right, we should do well to imitate such conduct; if wrong, we cannot too much detest it."

—*The Life* 1770. Dr. Maxwell's *Collectanea*.

Somebody observing that the Scotch Highlanders, in the year 1745, had made surprising efforts, considering their numerous wants and disadvantages: "Yes, Sir," said he, "their wants were numerous; but you have not mentioned the greatest of them all—the want of law".

—*The Life*. 1770. Dr. Maxwell's *Collectanea*.

He would not allow Scotland to derive any credit from Lord Mansfield; for he was educated in England. "Much," said he, "may be made of a Scotchman, if he be *caught* young."

—*The Life*. 1772, Spring.

On Sunday, April 5th, after attending divine service at St. Paul's church, I found him alone. Of a schoolmaster of his acquaintance, a native of Scotland, he said, "He has a great deal of good about him; but he is also very defective in some respects. His inner part is good, but his outer part is mighty awkward. You in Scotland do not attain that nice critical skill in languages which we get in our schools in England. I would not put a boy to him whom I intended for a man of learning. But for the sons of citizens, who are to learn a little, get good morals, and then go to trade, he may do very well." —*The Life*. 1772, April 5th.

On Saturday, May 1st, we dined by ourselves at our old rendezvous, the Mitre Tavern. He was placid, but not much disposed to talk. He observed, that "The Irish mix better with the English than the Scotch do; their language is nearer to English; as a proof of which, they succeed very well as players, which Scotchmen do not. Then, Sir, they have not that extreme nationality which we find in the Scotch. I will do you, Boswell, the justice to say, that you are the most *unscotchified* of your countrymen. You are almost the only instance of a Scotchman that I have known, who did not at

every other sentence bring in some other Scotchman." —*The Life*. 1773, May 1st.

His prejudice against Scotland was announced almost as soon as he began to appear in the world of letters. In his *London*, a poem, are the following nervous lines :—

“For who would leave, unbrib’d, Hibernia’s land?
Or change the rocks of Scotland for the Strand?
There none are swept by sudden fate away;
But all, whom hunger spares, with age decay.”

The truth is, like the ancient Greeks and Romans, he allowed himself to look upon all nations but his own as barbarians: not only Hibernia, and Scotland, but Spain, Italy, and France, are attacked in the same poem. If he was particularly prejudiced against the Scots, it was because they were more in his way; because he thought their success in England rather exceeded the due proportion of their real merit; and because he could not but see in them that nationality which I believe no liberal-minded Scotsman will deny. He was indeed, if I may be allowed the phrase, at bottom much of a *John Bull*; much of a blunt *true-born Englishman*. There was a stratum of common clay under the rock of marble. He was voraciously fond of good eating; and he has a great deal of that quality called *humour*, which gives an oiliness and a gloss to every other quality.

I am, I flatter myself, completely a citizen of the world.—In my travels through Holland,

Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Corsica, France, I never felt myself from home ; and I sincerely love “every kindred and tongue and people and nation”. I subscribe to what my late truly learned and philosophical friend Mr. Crosbie said, that the English are better animals than the Scots ; they are nearer the fun ; their blood is richer, and more mellow : but when I humour any of them in an outrageous contempt of Scotland, I fairly own I treat them as children. And thus I have, at some moments, found myself obliged to treat even Dr. Johnson.

To Scotland however he ventured ; and he returned from it in great good humour, with his prejudices much lessened, and with very grateful feelings of the hospitality with which he was treated ; as is evident from that admirable work, his *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, which, to my utter astonishment, has been misapprehended, even to rancour, by many of my countrymen.

—*The Tour.* Introduction.

I here began to indulge *old Scottish* sentiments, and to express a warm regret, that, by our Union with England, we were no more ;—our independent kingdom was lost.—JOHNSON : “Sir, never talk of your independency, who could let your Queen remain twenty years in captivity, and then be put to death, without even a pretence of justice, without your ever attempting to rescue her ; and such a Queen too ! as every man of any gallantry of spirit

would have sacrificed his life for." Worthy Mr. JAMES KERR, Keeper of the Records: "Half our nation was bribed by English money". JOHNSON: "Sir, that is no defence: that makes you worse".—Good Mr. BROWN, Keeper of the Advocates' Library: "We had better say nothing about it".—BOSWELL: "You would have been glad, however, to have had us last war, Sir, to fight your battles!"—JOHNSON: "We should have had you for the same price, though there had been no Union, as we might have had Swiss, or other troops. No, no, I shall agree to a separation. You have only to *go home*."—Just as he had said this, I, to divert the subject, showed him the signed assurances of the three successive Kings of the Hanover family, to maintain the Presbyterian establishment in Scotland.—"We'll give you that," said he, "into the bargain."

We next went to the great church of St. Giles, which has lost its original magnificence in the inside, by being divided into four places of Presbyterian worship. "Come," said Dr. Johnson jocularly to Principal Robertson, "let me see what was once a church!" We entered that division which was formerly called the *New Church*, and of late the *High Church*, so well known by the eloquence of Dr. Hugh Blair. It is now very elegantly fitted up; but it was then shamefully dirty. Dr. Johnson said nothing at the time; but when we came to the great door of the Royal Infirmary, where, upon a board, was this inscription, "*Clean your feet!*", he turned about slyly, and said, "There

is no occasion for putting this at the doors of your churches!"

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 16th.

The conversation then turned on Atheism, on that horrible book, *Système de la Nature*: and on the supposition of an eternal necessity, without design, without a governing mind.—
JOHNSON: "If it were so, why has it ceased? Why don't we see men thus produced around us now? Why, at least, does it not keep pace, in some measure, with the progress of time? If it stops because there is now no need of it, then it is plain there is, and ever has been, an all-powerful intelligence. But stay!" said he, with one of his satiric laughs, "Ha! ha! ha! I shall suppose Scotchmen made necessarily, and Englishmen by choice."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 17th.

I told him the port here was the mouth of the river or water of *Leith*. "Not *Lethe*," said Mr. Nairne. "Why, Sir," said Dr. Johnson, "when a Scotchman sets out from this port for England, he forgets his native country." NAIRNE: "I hope, Sir, you will forget England here". JOHNSON: "Then 'twill be still more *Lethe*". He observed of the pier or quay, "You have no occasion for so large a one: your trade does not require it: but you are like a shopkeeper who takes a shop, not only for what he has to put into it, but that it may be believed he has a great deal to put into it."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 18th.

He then said, "I see a number of people bare-footed here: I suppose you all went so before the Union. Boswell, your ancestors went so, when they had as much land as your family has now. Yet Auchinleck is the *Field of Stones*; there would be bad going bare-footed there. The *Lairds*, however, did it." I bought some *speldings*, fish (generally whittings) salted and dried in a particular manner, being dipped in the sea and dried in the sun, and eaten by the Scots by way of a relish. He had never seen them, though they were sold in London. I insisted on *scottifying* his palate; but he was very reluctant. With difficulty I prevailed with him to let a bit of one of them lie in his mouth. He did not like it.

—*The Tour*. 1773, Aug. 18th.

We observed two occupations united in the same person, who had hung out two sign-posts. Upon one was, "James Hood, White Iron Smith" (*i.e.* Tin-plate Worker). Upon another, "The Art of Fencing taught, by James Hood". Upon this last were painted some trees, and two men fencing, one of whom had hit the other in the eye, to show his great dexterity; so that the art was well taught. JOHNSON: "Were I studying here, I should go and take a lesson. I remember Hope, in his book on this art, says, 'the Scotch are very good fencers'." —*The Tour*. 1773, Aug. 19th.

We went and saw Colonel Nairne's garden and grotto. Here was a fine old plane-tree.

Unluckily the colonel said, there was but this and another large tree in the county. This assertion was an excellent cue for Dr. Johnson, who laughed enormously, calling to me to hear it. He had expatiated to me on the nakedness of that part of Scotland which he had seen. His *Journey* has been violently abused, for what he has said upon this subject. But let it be considered, that when Dr. Johnson talks of trees, he means trees of good size, such as he was accustomed to see in England, and of these there are certainly very few upon the *eastern coast* of Scotland. Besides, he said that he meant to give only a map of the road; and let any traveller observe how many trees, which deserve the name, he can see from the road from Berwick to Aberdeen. Had Dr. Johnson said "there are *no* trees" upon this line, he would have said what is colloquially true; because, by no trees, in common speech, we mean few. When he is particular in counting, he may be attacked. I know not how Colonel Nairne came to say there were but *two* large trees in the county of Fife. I did not perceive that he smiled. There are certainly not a great many, but I could have shown him more than two at Balmuto, from whence my ancestors came, and which now belongs to a branch of my family.

The grotto was ingeniously constructed. In the front of it were petrified stocks of fir, plane, and some other tree. Dr. Johnson said, "Scotland has no right to boast of this grotto; it is owing to personal merit. I never denied per-

sonal merit to many of you.”—Professor Shaw said to me, as we walked, “This is a wonderful man: he is master of every subject he handles.” Dr. Watson allowed him a very strong understanding but wondered at his total inattention to established manners, as he came from London.
—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 20th.

When we came down from it [the town-hall], I met Mr. Gleg, a merchant here. He went with us to see the English chapel. It is situated on a pretty dry spot, and there is a fine walk to it. It is really an elegant building, both within and without. The organ is adorned with green and gold. Dr. Johnson gave a shilling extraordinary to the clerk, saying, “He belongs to an honest church”. I put him in mind, that episcopals were but *dissenters* here; they were only *tolerated*. “Sir,” said he, “we are here, as Christians in Turkey.”

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 21st.

As we travelled onwards from Montrose, we had the Grampian hills in our view, and some good land around us, but void of trees and hedges. Dr. Johnson has said ludicrously, in his *Journey*, that the *hedges* were of *stone*; for, instead of the verdant *thorn* to refresh the eye, we found the bare *wall* or *dike* intersecting the prospect. He observed, that it was wonderful to see a country so divested, so denuded of trees.
—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 21st.

We set out about eight in the morning, and

breakfasted at Ellon. The landlady said to me, "Is not this the great Doctor that is going about through the country?" I said, "Yes." "Ay," said she, "we heard of him. I made an errand into the room on purpose to see him. There is something great in his appearance: it is a pleasure to have such a man in one's house; a man who does so much good. If I had thought of it, I would have shown him a child of mine, who has had a lump on his throat for some time." "But," said I, "he is not a doctor of physic." "Is he an oculist?" said the landlord. "No," said I, "he is only a very learned man." LANDLORD: "They say he is the greatest man in England, except Lord Mansfield". Dr. Johnson was highly entertained with this, and I do think he was pleased too. He said, "I like the exception: to have called me the greatest man in England, would have been an unmeaning compliment: but the exception marked that the praise was in earnest; and, in *Scotland*, the exception must be *Lord Mansfield*, or—*Sir John Pringle*."

—*The Tour*. 1773, Aug. 24th.

After dinner, we walked to the old castle of Calder (pronounced Cawdor), the Thane of Cawdor's seat. I was sorry that my friend, this "prosperous gentleman", was not there. The old tower must be of great antiquity. There is a drawbridge,—what has been a moat,—and an ancient court. There is a hawthorn-tree, which rises like a wooden pillar through the rooms of the castle; for, by a strange con-

ceit, the walls have been built round it. The thickness of the walls, the small slanting windows, and a great iron door at the entrance on the second story as you ascend the stairs, all indicate the rude times in which this castle was erected. There were here some large venerable trees.

I was afraid of a quarrel between Dr. Johnson and Mr. M'Aulay, who talked slightly of the lower English clergy. The Doctor gave him a frowning look, and said, "This is a day of novelties: I have seen old trees in Scotland, and I have heard the English clergy treated with disrespect."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 27th.

A conversation took place, about saying grace at breakfast (as we do in Scotland) as well as at dinner and supper; in which Dr. Johnson said, "It is enough if we have stated seasons of prayer; no matter when. A man may as well pray when he mounts his horse, or a woman when she milks her cow (which Mr. Grant told us is done in the Highlands) as at meals; and custom is to be followed."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 28th.

Mr. Keith breakfasted with us. Dr. Johnson expatiated rather too strongly upon the benefits derived to Scotland from the Union, and the bad state of our people before it. I am entertained with his copious exaggeration upon that subject; but I am uneasy when people are by, who do not know him as well

as I do, and may be apt to think him narrow-minded. I therefore diverted the subject.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 29th.

After breakfast we got into a boat for Sky. It rained much when we set off, but cleared up as we advanced. One of the boatmen, who spoke English, said that a mile at land was two miles at sea. I then observed, that from Glenelg to Armidale in Sky, which was our present course, and is called twelve, was only six miles: but this he could not understand. "Well," said Dr. Johnson, "never talk to me of the native good sense of the Highlanders. Here is a fellow who calls one mile two, and yet cannot comprehend that twelve such imaginary miles make in truth but six."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 2nd.

Sir Alexander Macdonald having been an Eton scholar, and being a gentleman of talents, Dr. Johnson had been very well pleased with him in London. But my fellow-traveller and I were now full of the old Highland spirit, and were dissatisfied at hearing of racked rents and emigration; and finding a chief not surrounded by his clan. Dr. Johnson said, "Sir, the Highland chiefs should not be allowed to go farther south than Aberdeen. A strong-minded man, like Sir James Macdonald, may be improved by an English education; but in general, they will be tamed into insignificance."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 2nd.

My endeavours to rouse the English-bred Chieftain, in whose house we were, to the feudal and patriarchal feelings proving ineffectual, Dr. Johnson this morning tried to bring him to our way of thinking. JOHNSON: "Were I in your place, Sir, in seven years I would make this an independent island. I would roast oxen whole, and hang out a flag as a signal to the Macdonalds to come and get beef and whisky." Sir Alexander was still starting difficulties. JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir; if you are born to object, I have done with you. Sir, I would have a magazine of arms." SIR ALEXANDER: "'They would rust". JOHNSON: "Let there be men to keep them clean. Your ancestors did not use to let their arms rust."

We attempted in vain to communicate to him a portion of our enthusiasm. He bore with so polite a good-nature our warm, and what some might call Gothic expostulations on this subject, that I should not forgive myself, were I to record all that Dr. Johnson's ardour led him to say. This day was little better than a blank. —*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 4th.

After supper, I talked of the assiduity of the Scottish clergy, in visiting and privately instructing their parishioners, and observed how much in this they excelled the English clergy. Dr. Johnson would not let this pass. He tried to turn it off by saying, "There are different ways of instructing. Our clergy pray and preach." M'Leod and I pressed the subject, upon which he grew warm, and broke

forth: "I do not believe your people are better instructed. If they are, it is the blind leading the blind; for your clergy are not instructed themselves." Thinking he had gone a little too far, he checked himself, and added, "When I talk of the ignorance of your clergy, I talk of them as a body: I do not mean that there are not individuals who are learned (looking at Mr. M'Queen). I suppose there are such among the clergy in Muscovy. The clergy of England have produced the most valuable books in support of religion, both in theory and practice. What have your clergy done, since you sunk into Presbyterianism? Can you name one book of any value, on a religious subject, written by them?" We were silent. "I'll help you. Forbes wrote very well; but I believe he wrote before episcopacy was quite extinguished." And then pausing a little, he said, "Yes, you have Wishart *AGAINST* Repentance." BOSWELL: "But, Sir, we are not contending for the superior learning of our clergy, but for their superior assiduity". He bore us down again, with thundering against their ignorance, and said to me, "I see you have not been well taught; for you have not charity." He had been in some measure forced into this warmth, by the exulting air which I assumed; for, when he began, he said, "Since you *will* drive the nail!" He again thought of good Mr. M'Queen, and, taking him by the hand, said, "Sir, I did not mean any disrespect to you."

Here I must observe, that he conquered by

deserting his ground, and not meeting the argument as I had put it. The assiduity of the Scottish clergy is certainly greater than that of the English. His taking up the topic of their not having so much learning, was, though ingenious, yet a fallacy in logic. It was as if there should be a dispute whether a man's hair is well dressed, and Dr. Johnson should say, "Sir, his hair cannot be well dressed; for he has a dirty shirt. No man who has not clean linen has his hair well dressed." When some days afterwards he read this passage, he said, "No, Sir; I did not say that a man's hair could not be well dressed because he had not clean linen, but because he is bald."

He used one argument against the Scottish clergy being learned, which I doubt was not good. "As we believe a man dead till we know that he is alive; so we believe men ignorant till we know that they are learned." Now our maxim in law is, to presume a man alive, till we know he is dead. However, indeed, it may be answered, that we must first know he has lived; and that we have never known the learning of the Scottish clergy. Mr. M'Queen, though he was of opinion that Dr. Johnson had deserted the point really in dispute, was much pleased with what he said, and owned to me he thought it very just; and Mrs. M'Leod was so much captivated by his eloquence, that she told me, "I was a good advocate for a bad cause."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 23rd.

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We resolved not to go ashore again, but lie here in readiness. Dr. Johnson and I had each a bed in the cabin. Col sat at the fire in the fore-castle, with the captain, and Joseph, and the rest. I ate some dry oatmeal, of which I found a barrel in the cabin. I had not done this since I was a boy. Dr. Johnson owned that he too was fond of it when a boy; a circumstance which I was highly pleased to hear from him, as it gave me an opportunity of observing that, notwithstanding his joke on the article of OATS, he was himself a proof that this kind of *food* was not peculiar to the people of Scotland. —*The Tour*. 1773, Oct. 13th.

We had a very hard journey to-day. I had no bridle for my sheltie, but only a halter; and Joseph rode without a saddle. At one place, a loch having swelled over the road, we were obliged to plunge through pretty deep water. Dr. Johnson observed, how helpless a man would be, were he travelling here alone, and should meet with any accident; and said, “he longed to get to a *country of saddles and bridles*”. He was more out of humour to-day, than he has been in the course of our Tour, being fretted to find that his little horse could scarcely support his weight; and having suffered a loss, which, though small in itself, was of some consequence to him, while travelling the rugged steeps of Mull, where he was at times obliged to walk. The loss that I allude to was that of the large oak-stick, which, as I formerly mentioned, he had brought with

him from London. It was of great use to him in our wild peregrination; for, ever since his last illness in 1766, he has had a weakness in his knees, and has not been able to walk easily. It had too the properties of a measure; for one nail was driven into it at the length of a foot; another at that of a yard. In return for the services it had done him, he said, this morning he would make a present of it to some Museum; but he little thought he was so soon to lose it. As he preferred riding with a switch, it was entrusted to a fellow to be delivered to our baggage-man, who followed us at some distance; but we never saw it more. I could not persuade him out of a suspicion that it had been stolen. "No, no, my friend," said he, "it is not to be expected that any man in Mull who has got it will part with it. Consider, Sir, the value of such a *piece of timber* here!" —*The Tour.* 1773, Oct. 16th.

Sir Allan M'Lean bragged, that Scotland had the advantage of England, by its having more water. JOHNSON: "Sir, we would not have your water, to take the vile bogs which produce it. You have too much! A man who is drowned has more water than either of us;" and then he laughed. (But this was surely robust sophistry: for the people of taste in England, who have seen Scotland, own that its variety of rivers and lakes makes it naturally more beautiful than England in that respect.) Pursuing his victory over Sir Allan, he proceeded: "Your country consists of two things,

stone and water. There is, indeed, a little earth above the stone in some places, but a very little; and the stone is always appearing. It is like a man in rags; the naked skin is still peeping out." —*The Tour*. 1773, Oct. 21st.

On our arrival at the Saracen's Head Inn, at Glasgow, I was made happy by good accounts from home; and Dr. Johnson, who had not received a single letter since we left Aberdeen, found here a great many, the perusal of which entertained him much. He enjoyed in imagination the comforts which we could now command, and seemed to be in high glee. I remember, he put a leg up on each side of the grate, and said, with a mock solemnity, by way of soliloquy, but loud enough for me to hear it, "Here am I, an ENGLISH man, sitting by a coal fire." —*The Tour*. 1773, Oct. 28th.

The professors of the university being informed of our arrival, Dr. Stevenson, Dr. Reid, and Mr. Anderson, breakfasted with us. Mr. Anderson accompanied us while Dr. Johnson viewed this beautiful city. He had told me that one day in London, when Dr. Adam Smith was boasting of it, he turned to me and said, "Pray, Sir, have you ever seen Brentford?" This was surely a strong instance of his impatience, and spirit of contradiction. I put him in mind of it to-day, while he expressed his admiration of the elegant buildings, and whispered him, "Don't you feel some remorse?" —*The Tour*. 1773, Oct. 29th.

The Reverend Mr. Dun, our parish minister, who had dined with us yesterday, with some other company, insisted that Dr. Johnson and I should dine with him to-day. This gave me an opportunity to show my friend the road to the church, made by my father at a great expense, for about three miles, on his own estate, through a range of well-enclosed farms, with a row of trees on each side of it. He called it the *Via sacra*, and was very fond of it. Dr. Johnson, though he held notions far distant from those of the Presbyterian clergy, yet could associate on good terms with them. He indeed occasionally attacked them. One of them discovered a narrowness of information concerning the dignitaries of the Church of England, among whom may be found men of the greatest learning, virtue, and piety, and of a truly apostolic character. He talked before Dr. Johnson, of fat bishops and drowsy deans; and, in short, seemed to believe the illiberal and profane scoffings of professed satirists, or vulgar railers. Dr. Johnson was so highly offended, that he said to him, "Sir, you know no more of our church than a Hottentot." I was sorry that he brought this upon himself.

—*The Tour*. 1773, Nov. 5th.

Mr. Nairne came in, and he and I accompanied Dr. Johnson to Edinburgh Castle, which he owned was "a great place". But I must mention, as a striking instance of that spirit of contradiction to which he had a strong propensity, when Lord Elibank was some days after

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talking of it with the natural elation of a Scotchman, or of any man who is proud of a stately fortress in his own country, Dr. Johnson affected to despise it, observing that, "it would make a good *prison* in ENGLAND".

Lest it should be supposed that I have suppressed one of his sallies against my country, it may not be improper here to correct a mistaken account that has been circulated, as to his conversation this day. It has been said, that being desired to attend to the noble prospect from the Castle Hill, he replied, "Sir, the noblest prospect that a Scotchman ever sees, is the highroad that leads him to London." This lively sarcasm was thrown out at a tavern in London, in my presence, many years before. —*The Tour*. 1773, Nov. 10th.

His *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* is a most valuable performance. It abounds in extensive philosophical views of society, and in ingenious sentiment and lively description.

His private letters to Mrs. Thrale, written during the course of his journey, which therefore may be supposed to convey his genuine feelings at the time, abound in such benignant sentiments towards the people who showed him civilities, that no man whose temper is not very harsh and sour, can retain a doubt of the goodness of his heart.

It is painful to recollect with what rancour he was assailed by numbers of shallow irritable North Britons, on account of his supposed

injurious treatment of their country and countrymen, in his *Journey*. Had there been any just ground for such a charge, would the virtuous and candid Dempster have given his opinion of the book, in the terms in which I have quoted? Would the patriotic Knox have spoken of it as he has done? Would Mr. Tytler, surely

“——a *Scot*, if ever *Scot* there were”,

have expressed himself thus? And let me add, that, citizen of the world as I hold myself to be, I have that degree of predilection for my *natale solum*, nay, I have that just sense of the merit of an ancient nation which has been ever renowned for its valour, which in former times maintained its independence against a powerful neighbour, and in modern times has been equally distinguished for its ingenuity and industry in civilized life, that I should have felt a generous indignation at any injustice done to it. Johnson treated Scotland no worse than he did even his best friends, whose characters he used to give as they appeared to him, both in light and shade. Some people, who had not exercised their minds sufficiently, condemned him for censuring his friends. But Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose philosophical penetration and justness of thinking were not less known to those who lived with him, than his genius in his art is admired by the world, explained his conduct thus:—

“He was fond of discrimination, which he

could not show without pointing out the bad as well as the good in every character; and as his friends were those whose characters he knew best, they afforded him the best opportunity for showing the acuteness of his judgment.”
—*The Life.* 1775.

He expressed to his friend Mr. Windham of Norfolk, his wonder at the extreme jealousy of the Scotch, and their resentment at having their country described by him as it really was; when, to say that it was a country as good as England, would have been a great falsehood. “None of us,” said he, “would be offended if a foreigner who has travelled here should say that vines and olives don’t grow in England.” And as to his prejudice against the Scotch, which I always ascribed to that nationality which he observed in *them*, he said to the same gentleman, “When I find a Scotchman, to whom an Englishman is as a Scotchman, that Scotchman shall be an Englishman to me.” His intimacy with many gentlemen of Scotland, and his employing so many natives of that country as his amanuenses, prove that his prejudice was not virulent; and I have deposited in the British Museum, amongst other pieces of his writing, the following note in answer to one from me, asking if he would meet me at dinner at the Mitre, though a friend of mine, a Scotchman, was to be there:—

“Mr. Johnson does not see why Mr. Boswell should suppose a Scotchman less acceptable

than any other man. He will be at the Mitre.”

—*The Life.* 1775.

My much-valued friend, Dr. Barnard, now Bishop of Killaloe, having once expressed to him an apprehension, that if he should visit Ireland he might treat the people of that country more unfavourably than he had done the Scotch, he answered, with strong pointed double-edged wit, “Sir, you have no reason to be afraid of me. The Irish are not in a conspiracy to cheat the world by false representations of the merits of their countrymen. No, Sir; the Irish are a FAIR PEOPLE;—they never speak well of one another.”

Johnson told me of an instance of Scottish nationality, which made a very unfavourable impression upon his mind. A Scotchman of some consideration in London, solicited him to recommend by the weight of his learned authority, to be master of an English school, a person of whom he who recommended him confessed he knew no more but that he was his countryman. Johnson was shocked at this unconscientious conduct.

All the miserable cavillings against his *Journey*, in newspapers, magazines, and other fugitive publications, I can speak from certain knowledge, only furnished him with sport. At last there came out a scurrilous volume, larger than Johnson's own, filled with malignant abuse under a name, real or fictitious, of some low man, in an obscure corner of Scotland, though supposed to be the work of another

Scotchman, who has found means to make himself well known both in Scotland and England. The effect which it had upon Johnson was, to produce this pleasant observation to Mr. Seward, to whom he lent the book; "This fellow must be a blockhead. They don't know how to go about their abuse. Who will read a five shilling book against me? No, Sir, if they had wit, they should have kept pelting me with pamphlets."

—*The Life*. 1775.

I put him in mind that the landlord at Ellon in Scotland said, that he heard he was the greatest man in England,—next to Lord Mansfield. "Ay, Sir," said he, "the exception defined the idea. A Scotchman could go no farther :

‘The force of Nature could no farther go’."

—*The Life*. 1775, April 2nd.

I had brought with me a great bundle of Scotch magazines and newspapers, in which his *Journey to the Western Islands* was attacked in every mode; and I read a great part of them to him, knowing they would afford him entertainment. I wish the writers of them had been present: they would have been sufficiently vexed. One ludicrous imitation of his style, by Mr. Maclaurin, now one of the Scotch Judges, with the title of Lord Dreghorn, was distinguished by him from the rude mass. "This," said he, "is the best. But I could

caricature my own style much better myself." He defended his remark upon the general insufficiency of education in Scotland; and confirmed to me the authenticity of his witty saying on the learning of the Scotch:—"Their learning is like bread in a besieged town: every man gets a little, but no man gets a full meal." "There is," said he, "in Scotland, a diffusion of learning, a certain portion of it widely and thinly spread. A merchant has as much learning as one of their clergy."

—*The Life.* 1775, April 11th.

JOHNSON: "Lord Bute showed an undue partiality to Scotchmen. He turned out Dr. Nichols, a very eminent man, from being physician to the king, to make room for one of his countrymen, a man very low in his profession. He had ——— and ——— to go on errands for him. He had occasion for people to go on errands for him; but he should not have had Scotchmen; and, certainly, he should not have suffered them to have access to him before the first people in England."

I told him, that the admission of one of them before the first people in England, which had given the greatest offence, was no more than what happens at every minister's *levée*, where those who attend are admitted in the order that they have come, which is better than admitting them according to their rank; for if that were to be the rule, a man who has waited all the morning might have the mortification to see a peer, newly come, go in before

him, and keep him waiting still. JOHNSON: "True, Sir; but — should not have come to the *levée*, to be in the way of people of consequence. He saw Lord Bute at all times: and could have said what he had to say at any time, as well as at the *levée*."

—*The Life*. 1775, April 14th.

I told him that I had been informed by Mr. Orme, that many parts of the East Indies were better mapped than the Highlands of Scotland. JOHNSON: "That a country may be mapped, it must be travelled over". "Nay," said I, meaning to laugh with him at one of his prejudices, "can't you say, it is not *worth* mapping?"

—*The Life*. 1775, April 14th.

"I will not send compliments to my friends by name, because I would be loth to leave any out in the enumeration. Tell them, as you see them, how well I speak of Scotch politeness, and Scotch hospitality, and Scotch beauty, and of everything Scotch, but Scotch oat-cakes, and Scotch prejudices."

—*The Life*. 1775, May 27th.

I saw here [at Lichfield], for the first time, *oat ale*; and oat cakes, not hard as in Scotland, but soft like a Yorkshire cake, were served at breakfast. It was pleasant to me to find, that "*Oats*", the "*food of horses*", were so much used as the *food of the people* in Dr. Johnson's own town.

—*The Life*. 1776, March 23rd.

I observed that it was strange how well Scotchmen were known to one another in their own country, though born in very distant counties; for we do not find that the gentlemen of neighbouring counties in England are mutually known to each other. Johnson, with his usual acuteness, at once saw and explained the reason of this: "Why, Sir, you have Edinburgh, where the gentlemen from all your counties meet, and which is not so large but they are all known. There is no such common place of collection in England, except London, where from its great size and diffusion, many of those who reside in contiguous counties of England, may long remain unknown to each other." —*The Life*. 1776, March 25th.

Having left Ashbourne in the evening, we stopped to change horses at Derby, and availed ourselves of a moment to enjoy the conversation of my countryman, Dr. Butter, then physician there. He was in great indignation because Lord Mountstuart's Bill for a Scotch militia had been lost. Dr. Johnson was as violent against it. "I am glad," said he, "that Parliament has had the spirit to throw it out. You wanted to take advantage of the timidity of our scoundrels" (meaning, I suppose, the Ministry). It may be observed that he used the epithet scoundrel very commonly—not quite in the sense in which it is generally understood, but as a strong term of disapprobation; as, when he abruptly answered Mrs. Thrale who had asked him how he did,

“Ready to become a scoundrel, Madam ; with a little more spoiling you wili, I think, make me a complete rascal.” He meant, easy to become a capricious and self-indulgent valetudinarian—a character for which I have heard him express great disgust.

—*The Life.* 1776, March 27th.

The peculiar respect paid to the military character in France was mentioned. BOSWELL: “I should think that where military men are so numerous, they would be less valued as not being rare”. JOHNSON: “Nay, Sir, wherever a particular character or profession is high in the estimation of a people, those who are of it will be valued above other men. We value an Englishman high in this country, and yet Englishmen are not rare in it.”

—*The Life.* 1776, April 3rd.

“Lord Hailes’s *Annals of Scotland* have not that painted form which is the taste of this age, but it is a book which will always sell, it has such a stability of dates, such a certainty of facts, and such a punctuality of citation. I never before read Scotch history with certainty.”

—*The Life.* 1776, May.

Mr. Arthur Lee mentioned some Scotch who had taken possession of a barren part of America, and wondered why they should choose it. JOHNSON: “Why, Sir, all barrenness is comparative. The *Scotch* would not know it to be barren.” BOSWELL: “Come, come, he is flattering the English. You have now been in

Scotland, Sir, and say if you did not see meat and drink enough there." JOHNSON: "Why yes, Sir; meat and drink enough to give the inhabitants sufficient strength to run away from home". All these quick and lively sallies were said sportively, quite in jest, and with a smile, which showed that he meant only wit. Upon this topic, he and Mr. Wilkes could perfectly assimilate; here was a bond of union between them, and I was conscious that as both of them had visited Caledonia, both were fully satisfied of the strange narrow ignorance of those who imagine that it is a land of famine. But they amused themselves with persevering in the old jokes. When I claimed a superiority for Scotland over England in one respect, that no man can be arrested there for a debt, merely because another swears it against him; but there must first be the judgment of a court of law ascertaining its justice; and that a seizure of the person, before judgment is obtained, can take place only if his creditor should swear that he is about to fly from the country, or, as it is technically expressed, is *in meditatione fugæ*; WILKES: "That, I should think, may be safely sworn of all the Scotch nation". JOHNSON (to Mr. Wilkes): "You must know, Sir, I lately took my friend Boswell, and showed him genuine civilized life in an English provincial town. I turned him loose at Lichfield, my native city, that he might see for once real civility: for you know he lives among savages in Scotland, and among rakes in London." WILKES: "Except when he is with grave, sober,

decent people, like you and me". JOHNSON (smiling): "And we ashamed of him".

—*The Life*. 1776, May 15th.

Mr. Wilkes remarked, that "among all the bold flights of Shakespeare's imagination, the boldest was making Birnam Wood march to Dunsinane, creating a wood where there never was a shrub; a wood in Scotland! ha! ha! ha!" And he also observed, that "the clannish slavery of the Highlands of Scotland was the single exception to Milton's remark of 'The Mountain Nymph, sweet Liberty' being worshipped in all hilly countries."—"When I was at Inverary," said he, "on a visit to my old friend, Archibald, Duke of Argyle, his dependants congratulated me on being such a favourite of his Grace. I said, 'It is, then, gentlemen, truly lucky for me; for if I had displeased the Duke, and he had wished it, there is not a Campbell among you but would have been ready to bring John Wilkes's head to him in a charger. It would have been only

'Off with his head. So much for *Aylesbury*'.

I was then member for Aylesbury."

—*The Life*. 1776, May 15th.

After dinner we had an accession of Mrs. Knowles, the Quaker lady, well known for her various talents, and of Mr. Alderman Lee. Amidst some patriotic groans, somebody, I think the Alderman, said, "Poor old England is lost." JOHNSON: "Sir, it is not so much to

be lamented that old England is lost, as that the Scotch have found it". WILKES: "Had Lord Bute governed Scotland only, I should not have taken the trouble to write his eulogy, and dedicate 'MORTIMER' to him".

—*The Life*. 1776, May 15th.

"Sir Alexander Dick is the only Scotchman liberal enough not to be angry that I could not find trees where trees were not. I was much delighted by his kind letter."

—*The Life*. 1777, July 22nd.

I ventured to mention a person who was as violent a Scotchman as he was an Englishman; and literally had the same contempt for an Englishman compared with a Scotchman, that he had for a Scotchman compared with an Englishman; and that he would say of Dr. Johnson, "Damned rascal! to talk as he does of the Scotch." This seemed, for a moment, "to give him pause". It perhaps presented his extreme prejudice against the Scotch in a point of view somewhat new to him, by the effect of *contrast*. —*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 19th.

At dinner Mrs. Thrale expressed a wish to go and see Scotland. JOHNSON: "Seeing Scotland, Madam, is only seeing a worse England. It is seeing the flower gradually fade away to the naked stalk. Seeing the Hebrides, indeed, is seeing quite a different scene."

—*The Life*. 1778, April 7th.

ROBERTSON: "Dr. Johnson, allow me to say, that in one respect I have the advantage of you; when you were in Scotland you would not come to hear any of our preachers, whereas, when I am here, I attend your public worship without scruple, and indeed with great satisfaction". JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, that is not so extraordinary; the King of Siam sent ambassadors to Louis the Fourteenth; but Louis the Fourteenth sent none to the King of Siam".

Here my friend for once discovered a want of knowledge or forgetfulness, for Louis the Fourteenth did send an embassy to the King of Siam, and the Abbé Choisi, who was employed in it, published an account of it in two volumes.

—*The Life*. 1778, April 29th.

Mrs. Thrale mentioned Dryden. JOHNSON: "He puzzled himself about predestination. How foolish it was in Pope to give all his friendship to lords, who thought they honoured him by being with him; and to choose such lords as Burlington and Cobham, and Bolingbroke! (Bathurst was negative, a pleasing man; and I have heard no ill of Marchmont;) and then always saying, 'I do not value you for being a lord,' which was a sure proof that he did. I never say, I do not value Boswell more for being born to an estate, because I do not care." BOSWELL: "Nor for being a Scotchman?" JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir, I do value you more for being a Scotchman. You are a Scotchman without the faults of Scotchmen. You

would not have been so valuable as you are, had you not been a Scotchman."

—*The Life*. 1778, May 12th.

Johnson was well acquainted with Mr. Dossie, author of a treatise on Agriculture; and said of him, "Sir, of the objects which the Society of Arts have chiefly in view, the chemical effects of bodies operating upon other bodies, he knows more than almost any man." Johnson, in order to give Mr. Dossie his vote to be a member of this Society, paid up an arrear which had run on for two years. On this occasion he mentioned a circumstance, as characteristic of the Scotch. "One of that nation," said he, "who had been a candidate, against whom I had voted, came up to me with a civil salutation. Now, Sir, this is their way. An Englishman would have stomached it, and been sulky, and never have taken farther notice of you; but a Scotchman, Sir, though you vote nineteen times against him, will accost you with equal complaisance after each time, and the twentieth time, Sir, he will get your vote."

—*The Life*. 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's *Johnsoniana*.

Sir Joshua Reynolds praised Mudge's *Sermons*. JOHNSON: "Mudge's *Sermons* are good but not practical. He grasps more sense than he can hold; he takes more corn than he can make into meal; he opens a wide prospect, but it is so distant, it is indistinct. I love

Blair's *Sermons*. Though the dog is a Scotchman, and a Presbyterian, and everything he should not be, I was the first to praise them. Such was my candour." (Smiling.) MRS. BOSCAWEN: "Such his great merit, to get the better of all your prejudices". JOHNSON: "Why, Madam, let us compound the matter; let us ascribe it to my candour and his merit".

—*The Life*. 1781, April 20th.

On Tuesday, May 8th, I had the pleasure of again dining with Johnson and Mr. Wilkes, at Mr. Dilly's. No *negotiation* was now required to bring them together; for Johnson was so well satisfied with the former interview, that he was very glad to meet Wilkes again, who was this day seated between Dr. Beattie and Dr. Johnson (between *Truth* and *Reason*, as General Paoli said, when I told him of it). WILKES: "I have been thinking, Dr. Johnson, that there should be a bill brought into Parliament that the controverted elections for Scotland should be tried in that country at their own Abbey of Holyrood House, and not here; for the consequence of trying them here is, that we have an inundation of Scotchmen, who come up and never go back again. Now here is Boswell, who is come upon the election for his own county, which will not last a fortnight." JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir, I see no reason why they should be tried at all; for, you know, one Scotchman is as good as another". WILKES: "Pray, Boswell, how much may be got in a year by an Advocate at the Scotch bar?" Bos-

WELL: "I believe, two thousand pounds".
WILKES: "How can it be possible to spend that money in Scotland?" JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, the money may be spent in England; but there is a harder question. If one man in Scotland gets possession of two thousand pounds, what remains for all the rest of the nation?" WILKES: "You know, in the last war, the immense booty which Thurot carried off by the complete plunder of seven Scotch isles; he re-embarked with *three* and *sixpence*." Here again Johnson and Wilkes joined in extravagant sportive raillery upon the supposed poverty of Scotland, which Dr. Beattie and I did not think it worth our while to dispute.

—*The Life*. 1781, May 8th.

I accompanied him in Mr. Dilly's chaise to Shefford, where, talking of Lord Bute's never going to Scotland, he said, "As an Englishman, I should wish all the Scotch gentlemen should be educated in England; Scotland would become a province; they would spend all their rents in England." This is a subject of much consequence, and much delicacy. The advantage of an English education is unquestionably very great to Scotch gentlemen of talents and ambition; and regular visits to Scotland, and perhaps other means, might be effectually used to prevent them from being totally estranged from their native country, any more than a Cumberland or Northumberland gentleman, who has been educated in the south of England. I own, indeed, that it is no small

misfortune for Scotch gentlemen, who have neither talents nor ambition, to be educated in England, where they may be perhaps distinguished only by a nickname, lavish their fortune in giving expensive entertainments to those who laugh at them, and saunter about as mere idle insignificant hangers-on even upon the foolish great; when, if they had been judiciously brought up at home, they might have been comfortable and creditable members of society.

—*The Life.* 1781, June 5th.

After musing for some time, he said, "I wonder how I should have any enemies; for I do harm to nobody." BOSWELL: "In the first place, Sir, you will be pleased to recollect, that you set out with attacking the Scotch; so you got a whole nation for your enemies". JOHNSON: "Why, I own, that by my definition of *oats* I meant to vex them". BOSWELL: "Pray, Sir, can you trace the cause of your antipathy to the Scotch?" JOHNSON: "I cannot, Sir". BOSWELL: "Old Mr. Sheridan says, it was because they sold Charles the First". JOHNSON: "Then, Sir, old Mr. Sheridan has found out a very good reason".

Surely the most obstinate and sulky nationality, the most determined aversion to this great and good man, must be cured, when he is seen thus playing with one of his prejudices, of which he candidly admitted that he could not tell the reason. It was, however, probably owing to his having had in his view the worst part of the Scottish nation, the needy adven-

turers, many of whom he thought were advanced above their merits, by means of which he did not approve. Had he in his early life been in Scotland, and seen the worthy, sensible, independent gentlemen, who live rationally and hospitably at home, he never could have entertained such unfavourable and unjust notions of his fellow-subjects. And accordingly we find, that when he did visit Scotland, in the latter period of his life, he was fully sensible of all that it deserved, as I have already pointed out, when speaking of his *Journey to the Western Islands*. —*The Life*. 1783, March 21st.

Talking of the success of the Scotch in London, he imputed it, in a considerable degree, to their spirit of nationality. "You know, Sir," said he, "that no Scotchman publishes a book, or has a play brought upon the stage, but there are five hundred people ready to applaud him." —*The Life*. 1783.

Politics and Government

FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE

I talked of the recent expulsion of six students from the University of Oxford, who were methodists, and would not desist from publicly praying and exhorting. JOHNSON: "Sir, that expulsion was extremely just and proper. What have they to do at an University, who are not willing to be taught, but will presume to teach? Where is religion to be learnt, but at an University? Sir, they were examined, and found to be mighty ignorant fellows." BOSWELL: "But, was it not hard, Sir, to expel them, for I am told they were good beings?" JOHNSON: "I believe they might be good beings, but they were not fit to be in the University of Oxford. A cow is a very good animal in the field, but we turn her out of a garden." Lord Elibank used to repeat this as an illustration uncommonly happy. —*The Life*. 1772, April 14th.

We drank tea with Mrs. Williams. I introduced a question which has been much agitated in the Church of Scotland, whether the claim of lay-patrons to present ministers to parishes be well founded; and supposing it to be well

founded, whether it ought to be exercised without the concurrence of the people?

Supposing the question to be pleaded before the General Assembly, he dictated to me what follows :

“Against the right of patrons is commonly opposed, by the inferior judicatures, the plea of conscience. Their conscience tells them, that the people ought to choose their pastor; their conscience tells them, that they ought not to impose upon a congregation a minister ungrateful and unacceptable to his auditors. Conscience is nothing more than a conviction felt by ourselves of something to be done, or something to be avoided: and in questions of simple unperplexed morality, conscience is very often a guide that may be trusted. But before conscience can determine, the state of the question is supposed to be completely known. In questions of law, or of fact, conscience is very often confounded with opinion. No man’s conscience can tell him the rights of another man; they must be known by rational investigation, or historical inquiry. Opinion, which he that holds it may call his conscience, may teach some men that religion would be promoted, and quiet preserved by granting to the people universally the choice of their ministers. But it is a conscience very ill informed that violates the rights of one man, for the convenience of another. Religion cannot be promoted by injustice; and it was never yet found that a popular election was very quietly transacted.”

—*The Life.* 1773, May 1st.

I introduced the subject of toleration. JOHNSON: "Every society has a right to preserve public peace and order, and therefore has a good right to prohibit the propagation of opinions which have a dangerous tendency. To say the *magistrate* has this right, is using an inadequate word; it is the *society* for which the magistrate is agent. He may be morally or theologically wrong in restraining the propagation of opinions which he thinks dangerous, but he is politically right." MAYO: "I am of opinion, Sir, that every man is entitled to liberty of conscience in religion; and that the magistrate cannot restrain that right". JOHNSON: "Sir, I agree with you. Every man has a right to liberty of conscience, and with that the magistrate cannot interfere. People confound liberty of thinking with liberty of talking; nay, with liberty of preaching. Every man has a physical right to think as he pleases; for it cannot be discovered how he thinks. He has not a moral right, for he ought to inform himself, and think justly. But, Sir, no member of a society has a right to *teach* any doctrine contrary to what the society holds to be true. The magistrate, I say, may be wrong in what he thinks; but while he thinks himself right, he may and ought to enforce what he thinks." MAYO: "Then, Sir, we are to remain always in error, and truth never can prevail; and the magistrate was right in persecuting the first Christians". JOHNSON: "Sir, the only method by which religious truth can be established is by martyrdom. The magistrate has a right to enforce what he

thinks; and he who is conscious of the truth has a right to suffer. I am afraid there is no other way of ascertaining the truth but by persecution on the one hand and enduring it on the other." GOLDSMITH: "But how is a man to act, Sir? Though firmly convinced of the truth of his doctrine, may he not think it wrong to expose himself to persecution? Has he a right to do so? Is it not, as it were, committing voluntary suicide?" JOHNSON: "Sir, as to voluntary suicide, as you call it, there are twenty thousand men in an army, who will go without scruple to be shot at, and mount a breach for fivepence a day". GOLDSMITH: "But have they a moral right to do this?" JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir, if you will not take the universal opinion of mankind, I have nothing to say. If mankind cannot defend their own way of thinking, I cannot defend it. Sir, if a man is in doubt whether it would be better for him to expose himself to martyrdom or not, he should not do it. He must be convinced that he has a delegation from Heaven." GOLDSMITH: "I would consider whether there is the greater chance of good or evil upon the whole. If I see a man who has fallen into a well, I would wish to help him out: but if there is a greater probability that he shall pull me in, than that I shall pull him out, I would not attempt it. So were I to go to Turkey, I might wish to convert the Grand Signor to the Christian faith; but when I considered that I should probably be put to death without effectuating my purpose in any degree, I should keep myself

quiet." JOHNSON: "Sir, you must consider that we have perfect and imperfect obligations. Perfect obligations, which are generally not to do something, are clear and positive; as, 'Thou shalt not kill'. But charity, for instance, is not definable by limits. It is a duty to give to the poor; but no man can say how much another should give to the poor, or when a man has given too little to save his soul. In the same manner it is a duty to instruct the ignorant, and of consequence to convert infidels to Christianity; but no man in the common course of things is obliged to carry this to such a degree as to incur the danger of martyrdom, as no man is obliged to strip himself to the shirt, in order to give charity. I have said that a man must be persuaded that he has a particular delegation from Heaven." GOLDSMITH: "How is this to be known? Our first reformers, who were burnt for not believing bread and wine to be CHRIST—" JOHNSON (interrupting him): "Sir, they were not burnt for not believing bread and wine to be CHRIST, but for insulting those who did believe it. And, Sir, when the first reformers began, they did not intend to be martyred; as many of them ran away as could." BOSWELL: "But, Sir, there was your countryman Elwal, who, you told me, challenged King George with his black-guards and his red-guards". JOHNSON: "My countryman Elwal, Sir, should have been put in the stocks—a proper pulpit for him; and he'd have had a numerous audience. A man who preaches in the stocks will always have hearers enough."

BOSWELL: "But Elwal thought himself in the right". JOHNSON: "We are not providing for mad people; there are places for them in the neighbourhood" (meaning Moorfields). MAYO: "But, Sir, is it not very hard that I should not be allowed to teach my children what I really believe to be the truth?" JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, you might contrive to teach your children *extra scandalum*; but, Sir, the magistrate, if he knows it, has a right to restrain you. Suppose you teach your children to be thieves?" MAYO: "This is making a joke of the subject". JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir, take it thus,—that you teach them the community of goods; for which there are as many plausible arguments as for most erroneous doctrines. You teach them that all things at first were in common, and that no man had a right to anything but as he laid his hands upon it; and that this still is, or ought to be, the rule amongst mankind. Here, Sir, you sap a great principle in society—property. And don't you think the magistrate would have a right to prevent you? Or, suppose you should teach your children the notion of the Adamites, and they should run naked into the streets, would not the magistrate have a right to flog 'em into their doublets?" MAYO: "I think the magistrate has no right to interfere till there is some overt act". BOSWELL: "So, Sir, though he sees an enemy to the state charging a blunderbuss, he is not to interfere till it is fired off!" MAYO: "He must be sure of its direction against the state". JOHNSON: "The magistrate is to judge of that.

He has no right to restrain your thinking, because the evil centres in yourself. If a man were sitting at this table, and chopping off his fingers, the magistrate, as guardian of the community, has no authority to restrain him, however he might do it from kindness as a parent. Though, indeed, upon more consideration, I think he may; as it is probable, that he who is chopping off his own fingers, may soon proceed to chop off those of other people. If I think it right to steal Mr. Dilly's plate, I am a bad man; but he can say nothing to me. If I make an open declaration that I think so, he will keep me out of his house. If I put forth my hand, I shall be sent to Newgate. This is the gradation of thinking, preaching, and acting: if a man thinks erroneously, he may keep his thoughts to himself, and nobody will trouble him; if he preaches erroneous doctrine, society may expel him; if he acts in consequence of it, the law takes place, and he is hanged." MAYO: "But, Sir, ought not Christians to have liberty of conscience?" JOHNSON: "I have already told you so, Sir. You are coming back to where you were." BOSWELL: "Dr. Mayo is always taking a return post-chaise, and going the stage over again. He has it at half-price." JOHNSON: "Dr. Mayo, like other champions for unlimited toleration, has got a set of words. Sir, it is no matter, politically, whether the magistrate be right or wrong. Suppose a club were to be formed, to drink confusion to King George the Third, and a happy restoration to Charles the Third; this would be very bad with respect to

the state; but every member of that club must either conform to its rules, or be turned out of it. Old Baxter, I remember, maintains that the magistrate should 'tolerate all things that are tolerable'. This is no good definition of toleration upon any principle; but it shows that he thought some things were not tolerable." TOPLADY: "Sir, you have untwisted this difficult subject with great dexterity".

—*The Life*. 1773, May 7th.

A gentleman present ventured to ask Dr. Johnson if there was not a material difference as to toleration of opinions which lead to action, and opinions merely speculative; for instance, would it be wrong in the magistrate to tolerate those who preach against the doctrine of the TRINITY? The gentleman, with submissive deference, said, he had only hinted at the question from a desire to hear Dr. Johnson's opinion upon it. JOHNSON: "Why then, Sir, I think that permitting men to preach any opinion contrary to the doctrine of the established Church, tends, in a certain degree, to lessen the authority of the Church, and consequently to lessen the influence of religion".—"It may be considered," said the gentleman, "whether it would not be politic to tolerate in such a case." JOHNSON: "Sir, we have been talking of *right*: this is another question. I think it is *not* politic to tolerate in such a case." —*The Life*. 1773, May 7th.

On Saturday, April 3rd, I visited him at night,

and found him sitting in Mrs. Williams's room, with her, and one who, he afterwards told me, was a natural son of the second Lord Southwell. The table had a singular appearance, being covered with a heterogeneous assemblage of oysters and porter for his company, and tea for himself. I mentioned my having heard an eminent physician, who was himself a Christian, argue in favour of universal toleration, and maintain, that no man could be hurt by another man's differing from him in opinion. JOHNSON: "Sir, you are, to a certain degree, hurt by knowing that even one man does not believe"

—*The Life*. 1779, April 3rd.

Talking on the subject of toleration, one day when some friends were with him in his study, he made his usual remark, that the State has a right to regulate the religion of the people, who are the children of the State. A clergyman having readily acquiesced in this, Johnson, who loved discussion, observed, "But, Sir, you must go round to other states than our own. You do not know what a Brahmin has to say for himself. In short, Sir, I have got no farther than this: every man has a right to utter what he thinks truth, and every other man has a right to knock him down for it. Martyrdom is the test."

—*The Life*. 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's *Johnsoniana*.

I mentioned Dr. Johnson's excellent distinction between liberty of conscience and liberty

of teaching. JOHNSON: "Consider, Sir; if you have children whom you wish to educate in the principles of the Church of England, and there comes a Quaker who tries to pervert them to his principles, you would drive away the Quaker. You would not trust to the predomination of right, which you believe is in your opinions; you will keep wrong out of their heads. Now the vulgar are the children of the State. If any one attempts to teach them doctrines contrary to what the State approves, the magistrate may and ought to restrain him." SEWARD: "Would you restrain private conversation, Sir?" JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, it is difficult to say where private conversation begins and where it ends. If we three should discuss even the great question concerning the existence of a Supreme Being by ourselves, we should not be restrained; for that would be to put an end to all improvement. But if we should discuss it in the presence of ten boarding-school girls and as many boys, I think the magistrate would do well to put us in the stocks, to finish the debate there."

—*The Life*. 1783, April 28th.

WHIG *versus* TORY

In politics he was deemed a Tory, but certainly was not so in the obnoxious or party sense of the term; for while he asserted the legal and salutary prerogatives of the Crown, he no less respected the constitutional liberties of

the people. Whiggism, at the time of the Revolution, he said, was accompanied with certain principles: but latterly, as a mere party distinction under Walpole and the Pelhams, was no better than the politics of stock-jobbers, and the religion of infidels.

He detested the idea of governing by Parliamentary corruption, and asserted most strenuously, that a prince steadily and conspicuously pursuing the interests of his people, could not fail of Parliamentary concurrence. A prince of ability, he contended, might and should be the directing soul and spirit of his own administration; in short, his own minister, and not the mere head of a party; and then, and not till then, would the royal dignity be sincerely respected.

Johnson seemed to think that a certain degree of Crown influence over the Houses of Parliament (not meaning a corrupt and shameful dependence) was very salutary, nay, even necessary, in our mixed government. "For," said he, "if the members were under no Crown influence, and disqualified from receiving any gratification from Court, and resembled, as they possibly might, Pym and Haslerig, and other stubborn and sturdy members of the Long Parliament, the wheels of government would be totally obstructed. Such men would oppose merely to show their power, from envy, jealousy, and perversity of disposition; and not gaining themselves, would hate and oppose all who did; not loving the person of the prince, and conceiving they owed him little gratitude, from the

mere spirit of insolence and contradiction, they would oppose and thwart him upon all occasions."

The inseparable imperfection annexed to all human governments, consisted, he said, in not being able to create a sufficient fund of virtue and principle to carry the laws into due and effectual execution. Wisdom might plan, but virtue alone could execute. And where could sufficient virtue be found? A variety of delegated, and often discretionary, powers must be entrusted somewhere: which, if not governed by integrity and conscience, would necessarily be abused, till at last the constable would sell his for a shilling.

This excellent person was sometimes charged with abetting slavish and arbitrary principles of government. Nothing in my opinion could be a grosser calumny and misrepresentation; for how can it be rationally supposed that he should adopt such pernicious and absurd opinions, who supported his philosophical character with so much dignity, was extremely jealous of his personal liberty and independence, and could not brook the smallest appearance of neglect or insult, even from the highest personages?

—*The Life.* 1770. Dr. Maxwell's *Collectanea*.

In 1771 he published another political pamphlet, entitled *Thoughts on the late Transactions respecting Falkland's Islands*, in which, upon materials furnished to him by the Ministry, and upon general topics, expanded in his rich style, he successfully endeavoured to persuade the nation that

it was wise and laudable to suffer the question of right to remain undecided, rather than involve our country in another war. It has been suggested by some, with what truth I shall not take upon me to decide, that he rated the consequence of those islands to Great Britain too low. But however this may be, every humane mind must surely applaud the earnestness with which he averted the calamity of war; a calamity so dreadful, that it is astonishing how civilized, nay, Christian nations can deliberately continue to renew it. His description of its miseries in this pamphlet is one of the finest pieces of eloquence in the English language. Upon this occasion, too, we find Johnson lashing the party in opposition with unbounded severity, and making the fullest use of what he ever reckoned a most effectual argumentative instrument—contempt. His character of their very able mysterious champion, Junius, is executed with all the force of his genius, and finished with the highest care. He seems to have exulted in sallying forth to single combat against the boasted and formidable hero, who bade defiance to “principalities and powers, and the rulers of this world”.

This pamphlet, it is observable, was softened in one particular, after the first edition; for the conclusion of Mr. George Grenville’s character stood thus: “Let him not, however, be depreciated in his grave. He had powers not universally possessed: could he have enforced payment of the Manilla ransom, *he could have counted it.*” Which instead of retaining its sly

...point, was reduced to a mere flat unmeaning expression, or, if I may use the word—*truism*: “He had powers not universally possessed: and if he sometimes erred, he was likewise sometimes right”. —*The Life*. 1771.

He said, “Walpole was a minister given by the King to the people: Pitt was a minister given by the people to the King,—as an adjunct.” —*The Life*. 1772, May 9th.

He talked with approbation of an intended edition of *The Spectator*, with notes; two volumes of which had been prepared by a gentleman eminent in the literary world, and the materials which he had collected for the remainder had been transferred to another hand. He observed, that all works which describe manners require notes in sixty or seventy years, or less; and told us, he had communicated all he knew that could throw light upon *The Spectator*. He said, “Addison had made his Sir Andrew Freeport a true Whig, arguing against giving charity to beggars, and throwing out other such ungracious sentiments; but that he had thought better, and made amends by making him found an hospital for decayed farmers.” He called for the volume of *The Spectator*, in which that account is contained, and read it aloud to us. He read so well, that everything acquired additional weight and grace from his utterance.

—*The Life*. 1773, April 3rd.

The General observed that Martinelli was a Whig. JOHNSON: "I am sorry for it. It shows the spirit of the times: he is obliged to temporize." BOSWELL: "I rather think, Sir, that Toryism prevails in this reign". JOHNSON: "I know not why you should think so, Sir. You see your friend Lord Lyttelton, a nobleman, is obliged in his History to write the most vulgar Whiggism." —*The Life*. 1773, April 15th.

An eminent public character being mentioned;—JOHNSON: "I remember being present when he showed himself to be so corrupted, or at least something so different from what I think right, as to maintain that a member of Parliament should go along with his party right or wrong. Now, Sir, this is so remote from native virtue, from scholastic virtue, that a good man must have undergone a great change before he can reconcile himself to such a doctrine. It is maintaining that you may lie to the public; for you lie when you call that right which you think wrong, or the reverse. A friend of ours, who is too much an echo of that gentleman, observed, 'that a man who does not stick uniformly to a party is only waiting to be bought'. 'Why then,' said I, 'he is only waiting to be what that gentleman is already.' " —*The Life*. 1773, April 15th.

Dr. Johnson now said, a certain eminent political friend of ours was wrong, in his maxim

of sticking to a certain set of *men* on all occasions. "I can see that a man may do right to stick to a *party*," said he; "that is to say, he is a Whig, or he is a Tory, and he thinks one of those parties upon the whole the best, and that to make it prevail, it must be generally supported, though, in particulars, it may be wrong. He takes its faggot of principles, in which there are fewer rotten sticks than in the other, though some rotten sticks to be sure; and they cannot well be separated. But, to bind one's self to one man, or one set of men (who may be right to-day and wrong to-morrow) without any general preference of system, I must disapprove."

—*The Tour*. 1773, Aug. 15th.

This morning the subject of politics was introduced. JOHNSON: "Pulteney was as paltry a fellow as could be. He was a Whig, who pretended to be honest; and you know it is ridiculous for a Whig to pretend to be honest. He cannot hold it out." He called Mr. Pitt a meteor; Sir Robert Walpole a fixed star. He said, "It is wonderful to think that all the force of government was required to prevent Wilkes from being chosen the chief magistrate of London, though the liverymen knew he would rob their shops,—knew he would debauch their daughters." —*The Tour*. 1773, Oct. 21st.

The morning was chiefly taken up by Dr. Johnson's giving an account of our Tour. The subject of difference in political principles

was introduced. JOHNSON: "It is much increased by opposition. There was a violent Whig, with whom I used to contend with great eagerness. After his death I felt my Toryism much abated." I suppose he meant Mr. Walmsley of Lichfield, whose character he has drawn so well in his life of Edmund Smith.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Nov. 10th.

Lord Newhaven and Johnson carried on an argument for some time, concerning the Middlesex election. Johnson said, "Parliament may be considered as bound by law, as a man is bound where there is nobody to tie the knot. As it is clear that the House of Commons may expel, and expel again and again, why not allow of the power to incapacitate for that Parliament, rather than have a perpetual contest kept up between Parliament and the people." Lord Newhaven took the opposite side; but respectfully said, "I speak with great deference to you, Dr. Johnson; I speak to be instructed." This had its full effect on my friend. He bowed his head almost as low as the table to a complimenting nobleman, and called out, "My Lord, my Lord, I do not desire all this ceremony; let us tell our minds to one another quietly." After the debate was over, he said, "I have got lights on the subject to-day which I had not before." This was a great deal from him, especially as he had written a pamphlet upon it.

He observed, "The House of Commons was

originally not a privilege of the people, but a check for the Crown on the House of Lords. I remember Henry VIII wanted them to do something; they hesitated in the morning, but did it in the afternoon. He told them, 'It is well you did, or half your heads should have been upon Temple Bar.' But the House of Commons is now no longer under the power of the Crown, and therefore must be bribed." He added, "I have no delight in talking of public affairs." —*The Life*. 1779, Oct. 12th.

One day having spoken very freely of those who were then in power, he said to me, "Between ourselves, Sir, I do not like to give opposition the satisfaction of knowing how much I disapprove of the Ministry." And when I mentioned that Mr. Burke had boasted how quiet the nation was in George the Second's reign, when Whigs were in power, compared with the present reign, when Tories governed; —"Why, Sir," said he, "you are to consider that Tories, having more reverence for government, will not oppose with the same violence as Whigs, who being unrestrained by that principle, will oppose by any means."

—*The Life*. 1781, April.

—One day, when I told him that I was a zealous Tory, but not enough "according to knowledge", and should be obliged to him for "a reason", he was so candid, and expressed himself so well, that I begged of him to repeat

what he had said, and I wrote down as follows:—

OF TORY AND WHIG

“A wise Tory and a wise Whig, I believe, will agree. Their principles are the same, though their modes of thinking are different. A high Tory makes Government unintelligible: it is lost in the clouds. A violent Whig makes it impracticable; he is for allowing so much liberty to every man, that there is not power enough to govern any man. The prejudice of the Tory is for establishment; the prejudice of the Whig is for innovation. A Tory does not wish to give more real power to Government, but that Government should have more reverence. Then they differ as to the Church. The Tory is not for giving more legal power to the Clergy, but wishes they should have a considerable influence, founded on the opinion of mankind: the Whig is for limiting and watching them with a narrow jealousy.”

—*The Life*. 1781, May.

I am very sorry that I did not take a note of an eloquent argument in which he maintained that the situation of Prince of Wales was the happiest of any persons in the kingdom, even beyond that of the Sovereign. I recollect only—the enjoyment of hope,—the high superiority of rank, without the anxious cares of government,—and a great degree of power, both from natural influence wisely used,

and from the sanguine expectations of those who look forward to the chance of future favour.

—*The Life*. 1783.

. Of Dr. Hurd, Bishop of Worcester, Johnson said to a friend—"Hurd, Sir, is one of a set of men who account for everything systematically; for instance, it has been a fashion to wear scarlet breeches; these men would tell you that, according to causes and effects, no other wear could at that time have been chosen." He, however, said of him at another time to the same gentleman, "Hurd, Sir, is a man whose acquaintance is a valuable acquisition."

That learned and ingenious Prelate, it is well known, published at one period of his life *Moral and Political Dialogues*, with a woefully Whiggish cast. Afterwards, his Lordship having thought better, came to see his error, and republished the work with a more Constitutional spirit. Johnson, however, was unwilling to allow him full credit for his political conversion. I remember when his Lordship declined the honour of being Archbishop of Canterbury, Johnson said, "I am glad he did not go to Lambeth; for, after all, I fear he is a Whig in his heart." —*The Life*. 1783.

On Saturday, May 17th, I saw him for a short time. Having mentioned that I had that morning been with old Mr. Sheridan, he remembered their former intimacy with a

cordial warmth, and said to me, "Tell Mr. Sheridan, I shall be glad to see him, and shake hands with him." BOSWELL: "It is to me very wonderful that resentment should be kept up so long". JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, it is not altogether resentment that he does not visit me; it is partly falling out of the habit,—partly disgust, as one has at a drug that has made him sick. Besides, he knows that I laugh at his oratory." Another day I spoke of one of our friends, of whom he, as well as I, had a very high opinion. He expatiated in his praise; but added, "Sir, he is a cursed Whig, a *bottomless* Whig, as they all are now."

—*The Life*. 1783, May 17th.

I asked him if it was true, as reported, that he had said lately, "I am for the King against Fox; but I am for Fox against Pitt." JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, the King is my master; but I do not know Pitt; and Fox is my friend."

"Fox," added he, "is a most extraordinary man. Here is a man," describing him in strong terms of objection in some respects, according as he apprehended, but which exalted his abilities the more, "who has divided the kingdom with Cæsar; so that it was a doubt whether the nation should be ruled by the sceptre of George III, or the tongue of Fox."

—*The Life*. 1784, June 9th.

THE AMERICAN COLONISTS AND SLAVERY

Parliament having been dissolved, and his friend Mr. Thrale, who was a steady supporter of Government, having again to encounter the storm of a contested election, he wrote a short political pamphlet, entitled *The Patriot*, addressed to the electors of Great Britain; a title which, to factious men who consider a patriot only as an opposer of the measures of Government, will appear strangely misapplied. It was, however, written with energetic vivacity, and, except those passages in which it endeavours to vindicate the glaring outrage of the House of Commons in the case of the Middlesex election, and to justify the attempt to reduce our fellow-subjects in America to unconditional submission, it contained an admirable display of the properties of a real patriot, in the original and genuine sense;—a sincere, steady, rational, and unbiassed friend to the interests and prosperity of his King and country. It must be acknowledged, however, that both in this and his two former pamphlets, there was, amidst many powerful arguments, not only a considerable portion of sophistry, but a contemptuous ridicule of his opponents, which was very provoking.

—*The Life*. 1774, October.

The doubts which, in my correspondence with him, I had ventured to state as to the justice and wisdom of the conduct of Great

Britain towards the American colonies, while I at the same time requested that he would enable me to inform myself upon that momentous subject, he had altogether disregarded; and had recently published a pamphlet, entitled, "Taxation no Tyranny: an answer to the Resolutions and Address of the American Congress".

He had long before indulged most unfavourable sentiments of our fellow-subjects in America. For, as early as 1769, I was told by Dr. John Campbell, that he had said of them, "Sir, they are a race of convicts, and ought to be thankful for anything we allow them short of hanging."

Of this performance I avoided to talk with him; for I had now formed a clear and settled opinion, that the people of America were well warranted to resist a claim that their fellow-subjects in the mother-country should have the entire command of their fortunes, by taxing them without their own consent; and the extreme violence which it breathed, appeared to me so unsuitable to the mildness of a Christian philosopher, and so directly opposite to the principles of peace which he had so beautifully recommended in his pamphlet respecting Falkland's Islands, that I was sorry to see him appear in so unfavourable a light. Besides, I could not perceive in it that ability of argument, or that felicity of expression, for which he was, upon other occasions, so eminent. Positive assertion, sarcastical severity, and extravagant ridicule, which he himself reprobated as a test of truth, were united in this rhapsody.

That this pamphlet was written at the desire of those who were then in power, I have no doubt: and, indeed, he owned to me, that it had been revised and curtailed by some of them. He told me, that they had struck out one passage, which was to this effect:

“That the Colonists could with no solidity argue from their not having been taxed while in their infancy, that they should not now be taxed. We do not put a calf into the plough; we wait till he is an ox.”

He said, “They struck it out either critically as too ludicrous, or politically as too exasperating. I care not which. It was their business. If an architect says, I will build five stories, and the man who employs him says, I will have only three, the employer is to decide.” “Yes, Sir,” said I, “in ordinary cases. But should it be so when the architect gives his skill and labour *gratis*?”

Unfavourable as I am constrained to say my opinion of this pamphlet was, yet, since it was congenial with the sentiments of numbers at that time, and as everything relating to the writings of Dr. Johnson is of importance in literary history, I shall therefore insert some passages which were struck out, it does not appear why, either by himself or those who revised it. They appear printed in a few proof leaves of it in my possession, marked with corrections in his own handwriting. I shall distinguish them by *italics*.

In the paragraph where he says, the Ameri-

cans were incited to resistance by European intelligence from

“men whom they thought their friends, but who were friends only to themselves”,
there followed,—

“and made by their selfishness, the enemies of their country”.

And the next paragraph ran thus:—

“On the original contrivers of mischief, *rather than on those whom they have deluded*, let an insulted nation pour out its vengeance”.

The paragraph which came next was in these words:—

“Unhappy is that country in which men can hope for advancement by favouring its enemies. The tranquillity of stable government is not always easily preserved against the machinations of single innovators; but what can be the hope of quiet, when factions hostile to the Legislature can be openly formed and openly avowed?”

After the paragraph which now concludes the pamphlet, there followed this, in which he certainly means the great Earl of Chatham, and glances at a certain popular Lord Chancellor:—

“If, by the fortune of war, they drive us utterly away, what they will do next can only be conjectured. If a new monarchy is erected, they will want a KING. He who first takes into his hand the sceptre of America, should have a name of good

omen. WILLIAM has been known both a conqueror and deliverer; and perhaps England, however condemned, might yet supply them with ANOTHER WILLIAM. Whigs, indeed, are not willing to be governed; and it is possible that KING WILLIAM may be strongly inclined to guide their measures: but Whigs have been cheated like other mortals, and suffered their leader to become their tyrant, under the name of their PROTECTOR. What more they will receive from England, no man can tell. In their rudiments of empire they may want a CHANCELLOR."

Then came this paragraph:—

"Their numbers are, at present, not quite sufficient for the greatness which, in some form of government or other, is to rival the ancient monarchies; but by Dr. Franklin's rule of progression, they will, in a century and a quarter, be more than equal to the inhabitants of Europe. When the Whigs of America are thus multiplied let the Princes of the earth tremble in their palaces. If they should continue to double and to double, their own hemisphere would not contain them. But let not our boldest oppugners of authority look forward with delight to this futurity of Whiggism."

How it ended I know not, as it is cut off abruptly at the foot of the last of these proof pages.

—*The Life.* 1775, March.

After supper I accompanied him to his apartment, and at my request he dictated to me an argument in favour of the negro who was then claiming his liberty, in an action in the Court

of Session in Scotland. He had always been very zealous against slavery in every form, in which I with all deference thought that he discovered "a zeal without knowledge". Upon one occasion, when in company with some very grave men at Oxford, his toast was, "Here's to the next insurrection of the negroes in the West Indies". His violent prejudice against our West Indian and American settlers appeared whenever there was an opportunity. Towards the conclusion of his *Taxation no Tyranny*, he says, "How is it that we hear the loudest *yelps* for liberty among the drivers of negroes?" and in his conversation with Mr. Wilkes he asked, "Where did Beckford and Trecothick learn English?" That Trecothick could both speak and write good English is well known. I myself was favoured with his correspondence concerning the brave Corsicans. And that Beckford could speak it with a spirit of honest resolution even to His Majesty, as his "faithful Lord Mayor of London", is commemorated by the noble monument erected to him in Guildhall.

The argument dictated by Dr. Johnson was as follows:—

"It must be agreed that in most ages many countries have had part of their inhabitants in a state of slavery; yet it may be doubted whether slavery can ever be supposed the natural condition of man. It is impossible not to conceive that men in their original state were equal; and very difficult to imagine how one could be subjected to another but by violent compulsion.

An individual may, indeed, forfeit his liberty by a crime; but he cannot, by that crime, forfeit the liberty of his children. What is true of a criminal seems true likewise of a captive. A man may accept life from a conquering enemy on condition of perpetual servitude; but it is very doubtful whether he can entail that servitude on his descendants; for no man can stipulate, without commission, for another. The condition which he himself accepts, his son or grandson perhaps would have rejected. If we should admit, what perhaps may with more reason be denied, that there are certain relations between man and man which may make slavery necessary and just, yet it can never be proved that he who is now suing for his freedom ever stood in any of those relations. He is certainly subject by no law, but that of violence, to his present master, who pretends no claim to his obedience, but that he bought him from a merchant of slaves, whose right to sell him never was examined. It is said that according to the constitutions of Jamaica he was legally enslaved; these constitutions are merely positive, and apparently injurious to the rights of mankind, because whoever is exposed to sale is condemned to slavery without appeal, by whatever fraud or violence he might have been originally brought into the merchant's power. In our own times princes have been sold by wretches to whose care they were entrusted, that they might have a European education; but when once they were brought to a market in the plantations, little would

avail either their dignity or their wrongs. The laws of Jamaica afford a negro no redress. His colour is considered as a sufficient testimony against him. It is to be lamented that moral right should ever give way to political convenience. But if temptations of interest are sometimes too strong for human virtue, let us at least retain a virtue where there is no temptation to quit it. In the present case there is apparent right on one side, and no convenience on the other. Inhabitants of this island can neither gain riches nor power by taking away the liberty of any part of the human species. The sum of the argument is this:—No man is by nature the property of another—The defendant is, therefore, by nature free—The rights of nature must be some way forfeited before they can be justly taken away—That the defendant has by any act forfeited the rights of nature we require to be proved, and if no proof of such forfeiture can be given, we doubt not the justice of the court will declare him free.”

I record Dr. Johnson’s argument fairly upon this particular case; where, perhaps, he was in the right. But I beg leave to enter my most solemn protest against his general doctrine with respect to the *Slave Trade*. For I will resolutely say, that his unfavourable notion of it was owing to prejudice, and imperfect or false information. The wild and dangerous attempt which has for some time been persisted in to obtain an act of our Legislature, to abolish so very important and necessary a branch of commercial

interest, must have been crushed at once, had not the insignificance of the zealots who vainly took the lead in it, made the vast body of planters, merchants, and others, whose immense properties are involved in the trade, reasonably enough suppose that there could be no danger. The encouragement which the attempt has received excites my wonder and indignation; and though some men of superior abilities have supported it—whether from a love of temporary popularity, when prosperous, or a love of general mischief, when desperate—my opinion is unshaken. To abolish a *status*, which in all ages God has sanctioned, and man has continued, would not only be *robbery* to an innumerable class of our fellow-subjects, but it would be extreme cruelty to the African savages, a portion of whom it saves from massacre, or intolerable bondage in their own country, and introduces into a much happier state of life; especially now when their passage to the West Indies, and their treatment there, is humanely regulated. To abolish this trade would be to

“——shut the gates of mercy on mankind”.

Whatever may have passed elsewhere concerning it, the House of Lords is wise and independent:—

Intaminatis fulget honoribus;
Nec sumit aut ponit secures
Arbitrio popularis auræ.

I have read, conversed, and thought much upon the subject, and would recommend to

all who are capable of conviction an excellent tract by my learned and ingenious friend John Ranby, Esq., entitled, *Doubts on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*. To Mr. Ranby's *Doubts*, I will apply Lord Chancellor Hardwicke's expression in praise of a Scotch law book, called *Dirlleton's Doubts*. "His *Doubts*," said his Lordship, "are better than most people's *Certainties*."

—*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 23rd.

From this pleasing subject, he, I know not how or why, made a sudden transition to one upon which he was a violent aggressor; for he said, "I am willing to love all mankind, *except an American*;" and his inflammable corruption bursting into horrid fire, he "breathed out threatenings and slaughter"; calling them, "Rascals—robbers—pirates;" and exclaiming, he'd "burn and destroy them." Miss Seward, looking to him with mild but steady astonishment, said, "Sir, this is an instance that we are always most violent against those whom we have injured."—He was irritated still more by this delicate and keen reproach; and roared out another tremendous volley, which one might fancy could be heard across the Atlantic. During this tempest I sat in great uneasiness, lamenting his heat of temper; till, by degrees, I diverted his attention to other topics.

—*The Life*. 1778, April 15th.

"My dear friend Dr. Bathurst," said he, with a warmth of approbation, "declared, he was glad that his father, who was a West

Indian planter, had left his affairs in total ruin, because having no estate he was not under the temptation of having slaves."

—*The Life*. 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's
Johnsoniana.

On Sunday, April 1st, I dined with him at Mr. Thrale's, with Sir Philip Jennings Clerk and Mr. Perkins, who had the superintendence of Mr. Thrale's brewery, with a salary of five hundred pounds a year. Sir Philip had the appearance of a gentleman of ancient family, well advanced in life. He wore his own white hair in a bag of goodly size, a black velvet coat, with an embroidered waistcoat, and very rich laced ruffles; which Mrs. Thrale said were old-fashioned, but which, for that reason, I thought the more respectable, more like a Tory; yet Sir Philip was then in Opposition in Parliament. "Ah, Sir," said Johnson, "ancient ruffles and modern principles do not agree." Sir Philip defended the Opposition to the American war ably and with temper, and I joined him. He said, the majority of the nation was against the Ministry. JOHNSON: "I, Sir, am against the Ministry; but it is for having too little of that, of which Opposition thinks they have too much. Were I a Minister, if any man wagged his finger against me, he should be turned out; for that which it is in the power of Government to give at pleasure to one or to another, should be given to the supporters of Government. If you will not oppose at the expense of losing your place, your

opposition will not be honest, you will feel no serious grievance; and the present Opposition is only a contest to get what others have. Sir Robert Walpole acted as I would do. As to the American war, the *sense* of the nation is *with* the Ministry. The majority of those who can *understand* is with it; the majority of those who can only *hear*, is against it; and as those who can only hear are more numerous than those who can understand, and Opposition is always loudest, a majority of the rabble will be for Opposition."

This boisterous vivacity entertained us; but the truth in my opinion was, that those who could understand the best were against the American war, as almost every man now is, when the question has been coolly considered.

—*The Life*. 1781, April 1st.

JACOBITISM

His separate publications [in 1739] were *A Complete Vindication of the Licensers of the Stage, from the malicious and scandalous Aspersions of Mr. Brooke, author of Gustavus Vasa*, being an ironical attack upon them for their suppression of that tragedy; and *Marmor Norfolciense; or, an Essay on an Ancient Prophetical Inscription, in Monkish Rhyme, lately discovered near Lynne, in Norfolk, by Probus Britannicus*. In this performance he, in a feigned inscription, supposed to have been found in Norfolk, the county of Sir Robert Walpole, then the obnoxious Prime Minister of this country, inveighs against the Brunswick

succession, and the measures of Government consequent upon it. To this supposed prophecy he added a Commentary, making each expression apply to the times, with warm anti-Hanoverian zeal.

This anonymous pamphlet, I believe, did not make so much noise as was expected, and, therefore, had not a very extensive circulation.

Marmor Norfolciense became exceedingly scarce, so that I, for many years, endeavoured in vain to procure a copy of it. At last I was indebted to the malice of one of Johnson's numerous petty adversaries, who in 1775 published a new edition of it, "with Notes and a Dedication to Samuel Johnson, LL.D., by Tribunus"; in which some puny scribbler invidiously attempted to found upon it a charge of inconsistency against its author, because he had accepted of a pension from his present Majesty, and had written in support of the measures of Government. As a mortification to such impotent malice, of which there are so many instances towards men of eminence, I am happy to relate that this *telum imbellè* did not reach its exalted object till about a year after it thus appeared, when I mentioned it to him, supposing that he knew of the republication. To my surprise he had not yet heard of it. He requested me to go directly and get it for him, which I did. He looked at it and laughed, and seemed to be much diverted with the feeble efforts of his unknown adversary, who, I hope, is alive to read this account. "Now," said he, "here is somebody who thinks he has vexed me sadly: yet if

it had not been for you, you rogue, I should probably never have seen it."

—*The Life.* 1739.

Johnson used to be a pretty frequent visitor at the house of Mr. Richardson, author of *Glarissa*, and other novels of extensive reputation. Mr. Hogarth came one day to see Richardson, soon after the execution of Dr. Cameron, for having taken arms for the house of Stuart in 1745-46; and being a warm partisan of George the Second, he observed to Richardson, that certainly there must have been some very unfavourable circumstances lately discovered in this particular case, which had induced the King to approve of an execution for rebellion so long after the time when it was committed, as this had the appearance of putting a man to death in cold blood, and was very unlike his Majesty's usual clemency. While he was talking, he perceived a person standing at a window in the room, shaking his head, and rolling himself about in a strange, ridiculous manner. He concluded that he was an idiot whom his relations had put under the care of Mr. Richardson, as a very good man. To his great surprise, however, this figure stalked forwards, to where he and Mr. Richardson were sitting, and all at once took up the argument, and burst out into an invective against George the Second, as one, who, upon all occasions, was unrelenting and barbarous; mentioning many instances; particularly, that when an officer of high rank had been acquitted by a

court-martial, George the Second had, with his own hand, struck his name off the list. In short, he displayed such a power of eloquence, that Hogarth looked at him with astonishment, and actually imagined that this idiot had been at the moment inspired. Neither Hogarth nor Johnson were made known to each other at this interview.

—*The Life.*

To such a degree of unrestrained frankness had he now accustomed me, that in the course of this evening I talked of the numerous reflections which had been thrown out against him, on account of his having accepted a pension from his present Majesty. "Why, Sir," said he, with a hearty laugh, "it is a mighty foolish noise that they make. I have accepted of a pension as a reward which has been thought due to my literary merit; and now that I have this pension, I am the same man in every respect that I have ever been; I retain the same principles. It is true, that I cannot now curse (smiling) the house of Hanover; nor would it be decent for me to drink King James's health in the wine that King George gives me money to pay for. But, Sir, I think that the pleasure of cursing the house of Hanover, and drinking King James's health, are amply overbalanced by three hundred pounds a year."

There was here, most certainly, an affectation of more Jacobitism than he really had; and indeed an intention of admitting, for the moment, in a much greater extent than it really existed, the charge of disaffection imputed to

him by the world, merely for the purpose of showing how dexterously he could repel an attack, even though he were placed in the most disadvantageous position; for I have heard him declare, that if holding up his right hand would have secured victory at Culloden to Prince Charles's army, he was not sure he would have held it up; so little confidence had he in the right claimed by the house of Stuart, and so fearful was he of the consequences of another revolution on the throne of Great Britain; and Mr. Topham Beauclerk assured me, he had heard him say this before he had his pension. At another time he said to Mr. Langton: "Nothing has ever offered, that has made it worth my while to consider the question fully." He, however, also said to the same gentleman, talking of King James the Second: "It was become impossible for him to reign any longer in this country." He no doubt had an early attachment to the house of Stuart; but his zeal had cooled as his reason strengthened. Indeed I heard him once say, "that after the death of a violent Whig, with whom he used to contend with great eagerness, he felt his Toryism much abated." I suppose he meant Mr. Walmsley.

Yet there is no doubt that at earlier periods he was wont often to exercise both his pleasantry and ingenuity in talking Jacobitism. My much respected friend, Dr. Douglas, now Bishop of Salisbury, has favoured me with the following admirable instance from his lordship's own recollection:—One day when dining at

old Mr. Langton's, where Miss Roberts, his niece, was one of the company, Johnson, with his usual complacent attention to the fair sex, took her by the hand, and said: "My dear, I hope you are a Jacobite." Old Mr. Langton, who, though a high and steady Tory, was attached to the present Royal Family, seemed offended, and asked Johnson, with great warmth, what he could mean by putting such a question to his niece? "Why, Sir," said Johnson, "I meant no offence to your niece, I meant her a great compliment. A Jacobite, Sir, believes in the divine right of kings. He that believes in the divine right of kings believes in a Divinity. A Jacobite believes in the divine rights of bishops. He that believes in the divine rights of bishops, believes in the divine authority of the Christian religion. Therefore, Sir, a Jacobite is neither an Atheist nor a Deist. That cannot be said of a Whig; for *Whiggism is a negation of all principle.*" —*The Life.* 1763, July 9th.

Talking of the Family of Stuart, he said: "It should seem that the Family at present on the throne has now established as good a right as the former Family, by the long consent of the people; and that to disturb this right might be considered as culpable. At the same time I own, that it is a very difficult question, when considered with respect to the house of Stuart. To oblige people to take oaths as to the disputed right, is wrong. I know not whether I could take them: but I do not blame those who do." So conscientious and so delicate was

he upon this subject, which has occasioned so much clamour against him.

—*The Life.* 1773, April 13th.

I asked if it was not strange that Government should permit so many infidel writings to pass without censure. JOHNSON: "Sir, it is mighty foolish. It is for want of knowing their own power. The present Family on the throne came to the Crown against the will of nine-tenths of the people. Whether those nine-tenths were right or wrong, it is not our business now to inquire. But such being the situation of the Royal Family, they were glad to encourage all who would be their friends. Now you know every bad man is a Whig; every man who has loose notions. The Church was all against this Family. They were, as I say, glad to encourage any friends; and therefore, since their accession, there is no instance of any man being kept back on account of his bad principles; and hence this inundation of impiety." I observed that Mr. Hume, some of whose writings were very unfavourable to religion, was, however, a Tory. JOHNSON: "Sir, Hume is a Tory by chance, as being a Scotchman; but not upon a principle of duty; for he has no principle. If he is anything, he is a Hobbist."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 30th.

The duchess was very attentive to Dr. Johnson. I know not how a *middle state* came to be mentioned. Her grace wished to hear him on that point. "Madam," said he, "your own

relation, Mr. Archibald Campbell, can tell you better about it than I can. He was a bishop of the Nonjuring communion, and wrote a book upon the subject." He engaged to get it for her grace. He afterwards gave a full history of Mr. Archibald Campbell, which I am sorry I do not recollect particularly. He said, Mr. Campbell had been bred a violent Whig, but afterwards "kept *better company*, and became a Tory." He said this with a smile, in pleasant allusion, as I thought, to the opposition between his own political principles and those of the duke's clan. He added that Mr. Campbell, after the Revolution, was thrown into gaol on account of his tenets; but, on application by letter to the old Lord Townshend, was released: that he always spoke of his lordship with great gratitude, saying, "though a *Whig*, he had humanity."

Dr. Johnson and I passed some time together, in June, 1784, at Pembroke College, Oxford, with the Reverend Dr. Adams, the Master; and I having expressed a regret that my note relative to Mr. Archibald Campbell was imperfect, he was then so good as to write with his own hand, on the blank page of my Journal, opposite to that which contains what I have now mentioned, the following paragraph; which, however, is not quite so full as the narrative he gave at Inveraray:

"The Honourable Archibald Campbell was, I believe, the nephew of the Marquis of Argyle. He began life by engaging in Monmouth's rebellion, and, to escape the law, lived some time

in Surinam. When he returned, he became zealous for episcopacy and monarchy; and at the Revolution adhered not only to the Non-jurors, but to those who refused to communicate with the Church of England, or to be present at any worship where the Usurper was mentioned as king. He was, I believe, more than once apprehended in the reign of King William, and once at the accession of George. He was the familiar friend of Hicks and Nelson; a man of letters, but injudicious; and very curious and inquisitive, but credulous. He lived in 1743, or '44, about 75 years old."

—*The Tour*. 1773, Oct. 25th.

Lord Elibank came to us, as did Sir William Forbes. The rash Attempt in 1745 being mentioned, I observed, that it would make a fine piece of History. Dr. Johnson said it would. Lord Elibank doubted whether any man of this age could give it impartially. JOHNSON: "A man, by talking with those of different sides, who were actors in it, and putting down all that he hears, may in time collect the materials of a good narrative. You are to consider, all history was at first oral. I suppose Voltaire was fifty years in collecting his *Louis XIV*, which he did in the way that I am proposing." ROBERTSON: "He did so. He lived much with all the great people who were concerned in that reign, and heard them talk of everything; and then either took Mr. Boswell's way, of writing down what he heard, or, which is as good, preserved it in his memory; for he has a won-

derful memory." With the leave, however, of this elegant historian, no man's memory can preserve facts or sayings with such fidelity as may be done by writing them down when they are recent. Dr. Robertson said: "It was now full time to make such a collection as Dr. Johnson suggested; for many of the people who were then in arms, were dropping off; and both Whigs and Jacobites were now come to talk with moderation." Lord Elbank said to him: "Mr. Robertson, the first thing that gave me a high opinion of you, was your saying in the Select Society, while parties ran high, soon after the year 1745, that you did not think worse of a man's moral character for his having been in rebellion. This was venturing to utter a liberal sentiment, while both sides had a detestation of each other."

Dr. Johnson observed, that being in rebellion from a notion of another's right was not connected with depravity; and that we had this proof of it, that all mankind applauded the pardoning of rebels; which they would not do in the case of robbers and murderers. He said, with a smile, that "he wondered that the phrase of *unnatural* rebellion should be so much used, for that all rebellion was natural to man."

—*The Tour*. 1773, Nov. 11th.

I told him, that I heard Dr. Percy was writing the history of the wolf in Great Britain. JOHNSON: "The wolf, Sir! why the wolf? Why does he not write of the bear, which we had formerly? Nay, it is said we had the

beaver. Or why does he not write of the grey rat, the Hanover rat, as it is called, because it is said to have come into this country about the time that the Family of Hanover came? I should like to see 'The History of the Grey Rat, by Thomas Percy, D.D., Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty'" (laughing immoderately). BOSWELL: "I am afraid a court chaplain could not decently write of the grey rat". JOHNSON: "Sir, he need not give it the name of the Hanover rat". Thus could he indulge a luxuriant, sportive imagination when talking of a friend whom he loved and esteemed.

—*The Life*. 1776, March 21st.

He had this evening (partly, I suppose, from the spirit of contradiction to his Whig friend) a violent argument with Dr. Taylor, as to the inclinations of the people of England at this time towards the Royal Family of Stuart. He grew so outrageous as to say, "that if England were fairly polled the present King would be sent away to-night, and his adherents hanged to-morrow." Taylor, who was as violent a Whig as Johnson was a Tory, was roused by this to a pitch of bellowing. He denied loudly what Johnson said, and maintained that there was an abhorrence against the Stuart Family, though he admitted that the people were not much attached to the present King. JOHNSON: "Sir, the state of the country is this: the people knowing it to be agreed on all hands that this King has not the hereditary right to the Crown, and there being no hope that he who has it

can be restored, have grown cold and indifferent upon the subject of loyalty, and have no warm attachment to any king. They would not, therefore, risk anything to restore the Exiled Family. They would not give 20s. a-piece to bring it about. But if a mere vote could do it, there would be twenty to one; at least, there would be a very great majority of voices for it. For, Sir, you are to consider, that all those who think a king has a right to his crown, as a man has to his estate, which is the just opinion, would be for restoring the king who certainly has the hereditary right, could he be trusted with it; in which there would be no danger now, when laws and everything else are so much advanced: and every king will govern by the laws. And you must also consider, Sir, that there is nothing on the other side to oppose this; for it is not alleged by anyone that the present Family has any inherent right: so that the Whigs could not have a contest between two rights."

—*The Life.* 1777, Sept. 17th.

He talked with regret and indignation of the factious opposition to Government at this time, and imputed it in a great measure to the Revolution. "Sir," said he, in a low voice, having come nearer to me, while his old prejudices seemed to be fomenting in his mind, "this Hanoverian Family is *isolée* here. They have no friends. Now the Stuarts had friends who stuck by them so late as 1745. When the right of the King is not revered, there will

not be reverence for those appointed by the King.” —*The Life*. 1783, March 21st.

I was glad when General Oglethorpe's arrival was announced, and we left the ladies. Dr. Johnson attended him in the parlour, and was as courteous as ever. The General said he was busy reading the writers of the middle age. Johnson said they were very curious. OGLETHORPE: “The House of Commons has usurped the power of the nation's money, and used it tyrannically. Government is now carried on by corrupt influence, instead of the inherent right in the King.” JOHNSON: “Sir, the want of inherent right in the King occasions all this disturbance. What we did at the Revolution was necessary; but it broke our constitution.” OGLETHORPE: “My father did not think it necessary”. —*The Life* 1783, March 22nd.

He talked with great regard of the Honourable Archibald Campbell, whose character he had given at the Duke of Argyle's table, when we were at Inveraray; and at this time wrote out for me, in his own hand, a fuller account of that learned and venerable writer, which I have published in its proper place. Johnson made a remark this evening which struck me a good deal. “I never,” said he, “knew a Non-juror who could reason.” Surely he did not mean to deny that faculty to many of their writers; to Hickes, Brett, and other eminent divines of that persuasion: and did not recollect that the seven Bishops, so justly celebrated

for their magnanimous resistance of arbitrary power, were yet Nonjurors to the new Government. The Nonjuring clergy of Scotland, indeed, who, excepting a few, have lately by a sudden stroke cut off all ties of allegiance to the house of Stuart, and resolved to pray for our present lawful Sovereign by name, may be thought to have confirmed this remark; as it may be said, that the divine indefeasible hereditary right which they professed to believe, if ever true, must be equally true still. Many of my readers will be surprised, when I mention that Johnson assured me he had never in his life been in a Nonjuring meeting-house.

—*The Life.* 1784, June 9th.

SUBORDINATION

“People,” he remarked, “may be taken in once, who imagine that an author is greater in private life than other men. Uncommon parts require uncommon opportunities for their exertion.

“In barbarous society, superiority of parts is of real consequence. Great strength or great wisdom is of much value to an individual. But in more polished times there are people to do everything for money; and then there are a number of other superiorities, such as those of birth, and fortune, and rank, that dissipate men’s attention, and leave no extraordinary share of respect for personal and intellectual superiority. This is wisely ordered by Provi-

dence, to preserve some equality among mankind.”

—*The Life*. 1763, May 16th.

Our conversation proceeded. “Sir,” said he, “I am a friend to subordination as most conducive to the happiness of society. There is a reciprocal pleasure in governing and being governed.”

—*The Life*. 1763, June 25th.

Rousseau’s treatise on the inequality of mankind was at this time a fashionable topic. It gave rise to an observation by Mr. Dempster, that the advantages of fortune and rank were nothing to a wise man, who ought to value only merit. JOHNSON: “If man were a savage, living in the woods by himself, this might be true; but in civilized society we all depend upon each other, and our happiness is very much owing to the good opinion of mankind. Now, Sir, in civilized society, external advantages make us more respected. A man with a good coat upon his back meets with a better reception than he who has a bad one. Sir, you may analyse this, and say what is there in it? But that will avail you nothing, for it is part of a general system. Pound St. Paul’s church into atoms, and consider any single atom; it is, to be sure, good for nothing; but put all these atoms together and you have St. Paul’s church. So it is with human felicity, which is made up of many ingredients, each of which may be shown to be very insignificant. In civilized society personal merit will not serve you so much as money will. Sir, you

may make the experiment. Go into the street and give one man a lecture on morality and another a shilling, and see which will respect you most. If you wish only to support nature, Sir William Petty fixes your allowance at three pounds a year; but as times are much altered, let us call it six pounds. This sum will fill your belly, shelter you from the weather, and even get you a strong lasting coat, supposing it to be made of good bull's hide. Now, Sir, all beyond this is artificial, and is desired in order to obtain a greater degree of respect from our fellow-creatures. And, Sir, if six hundred pounds a year procure a man more consequence, and, of course, more happiness than six pounds a year, the same proportion will hold as to six thousand, and so on, as far as opulence can be carried. Perhaps he who has a large fortune may not be so happy as he who has a small one; but that must proceed from other causes than from his having the large fortune: for, *cæteris paribus*, he who is rich in a civilized society must be happier than he who is poor; as riches, if properly used (and it is a man's own fault if they are not) must be productive of the highest advantages. Money, to be sure, of itself is of no use: for its only use is to part with it. Rousseau, and all those who deal in paradoxes, are led away by a childish desire of novelty. When I was a boy I used always to choose the wrong side of a debate, because most ingenious things, that is to say, most new things, could be said upon it. Sir, there is nothing for which you may not muster

up more plausible arguments than those which are urged against wealth and other external advantages. Why, now, there is stealing: why should it be thought a crime? When we consider by what unjust methods property has been often acquired, and that what was unjustly got it must be unjust to keep, where is the harm in one man's taking the property of another from him? Besides, Sir, when we consider the bad use that many people make of their property, and how much better use the thief may make of it, it may be defended as a very allowable practice. Yet, Sir, the experience of mankind has discovered stealing to be so very bad a thing that they make no scruple to hang a man for it."

It was suggested that kings must be unhappy, because they are deprived of the greatest of all satisfactions, easy and unreserved society. JOHNSON: "This is an ill-founded notion. Being a king does not exclude a man from such society. Great kings have always been social. The King of Prussia, the only great king at present, is very social. Charles the Second, the last king of England who was a man of parts, was social; and our Henrys and Edwards were all social."
—*The Life*. 1763, July 20th.

Mr. Dempster having endeavoured to maintain that intrinsic merit *ought* to make the only distinction among mankind. JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, mankind have found that this cannot be. How shall we determine the proportion of intrinsic merit? Were that to be the only distinc-

tion amongst mankind, we should soon quarrel about the degrees of it. Were all distinctions abolished, the strongest would not long acquiesce, but would endeavour to obtain a superiority by their bodily strength. But, Sir, as subordination is very necessary for society, and contentions for superiority very dangerous, mankind, that is to say, all civilized nations, have settled it upon a plain invariable principle. A man is born to hereditary rank; or his being appointed to certain offices gives him a certain rank. Subordination tends greatly to human happiness. Were we all upon an equality, we should have no other enjoyment than mere animal pleasure."

I said, I considered distinction or rank to be of so much importance in civilized society, that if I were asked on the same day to dine with the first duke in England, and with the first man in Britain for genius, I should hesitate which to prefer. JOHNSON: "To be sure, Sir, if you were to dine only once, and it were never to be known where you dined, you would choose rather to dine with the first man for genius; but to gain most respect, you should dine with the first duke in England. For nine people in ten that you meet with, would have a higher opinion of you for having dined with a duke; and the great genius himself would receive you better, because you had been with the great duke."

He took care to guard himself against any possible suspicion that his settled principles of reverence for rank and respect for wealth were at all owing to mean or interested motives: for

he asserted his own independence as a literary man.

“No man,” said he, “who ever lived by literature, has lived more independently than I have done.” He said he had taken longer time than he needed to have done in composing his *Dictionary*. He received our compliments upon that great work with complacency, and told us that the Academy *della Crusca* could scarcely believe that it was done by one man.

—*The Life*. 1763, July 20th.

He again insisted on the duty of maintaining subordination of rank. “Sir, I would no more deprive a nobleman of his respect than of his money. I consider myself as acting a part in the great system of society, and I do to others as I would have them do to me. I would behave to a nobleman as I should expect he would behave to me, were I a nobleman, and he Sam. Johnson. Sir, there is one Mrs. Macaulay, in this town, a great republican. One day when I was at her house, I put on a very grave countenance, and said to her, ‘Madam, I am now become a convert to your way of thinking. I am convinced that all mankind are upon an equal footing; and to give you an unquestionable proof, Madam, that I am in earnest, here is a very sensible, civil, well-behaved fellow-citizen, your footman; I desire that he may be allowed to sit down and dine with us.’ I thus, Sir, showed her the absurdity of the levelling doctrine. She has never liked me since. Sir, your levellers wish

to level *down* as far as themselves; but they cannot bear levelling *up* to themselves. They would all have some people under them; why not then have some people above them?"

I mentioned a certain author who disgusted me by his forwardness, and by showing no deference to noblemen into whose company he was admitted. JOHNSON: "Suppose a shoemaker should claim an equality with him, as he does with a lord: how he would stare. 'Why, Sir, do you stare?' says the shoemaker; 'I do great service to society. 'Tis true I am paid for doing it; but so are you, Sir; and I'm sorry to say it, better paid than I am, for doing something not so necessary. For mankind could do better without your books than without my shoes.' 'Thus, Sir, there would be a perpetual struggle for precedence, were there no fixed invariable rules for the distinction of rank, which creates no jealousy, as it is allowed to be accidental.'" —*The Life*. 1763, July 21st.

On his favourite subject of subordination, Johnson said: "So far is it from being true that men are naturally equal, that no two people can be half an hour together, but one shall acquire an evident superiority over the other."

I mentioned the advice given us by philosophers, to console ourselves, when distressed or embarrassed, by thinking of those who are in a worse situation than ourselves. This, I observed, could not apply to all, for there must be some who have nobody worse than they are.

JOHNSON: "Why, to be sure, Sir, there are; but they don't know it. There is no being so poor and so contemptible, who does not think there is somebody still poorer and still more contemptible." —*The Life*. 1766, Feb. 15th.

BOSWELL: "So, Sir, you laugh at schemes of political improvement". JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, most schemes of political improvements are very laughable things".

He observed, "Providence has wisely ordered that the more numerous men are, the more difficult it is for them to agree in anything, and so they are governed. There is no doubt, that if the poor should reason, 'We'll be the poor no longer, we'll make the rich take their turn,' they could easily do it, were it not that they can't agree. So the common soldiers, though so much more numerous than their officers, are governed by them for the same reason."

—*The Life*. 1769, Oct. 26th.

Being solicited to compose a funeral sermon for the daughter of a tradesman, he naturally inquired into the character of the deceased; and being told she was remarkable for her humility and condescension to inferiors, he observed, that those were very laudable qualities, but it might not be so easy to discover who the lady's inferiors were.

—*The Life*. 1770. Dr. Maxwell's *Collectanea*.

He refused to go out of a room before me

at Mr. Langton's house, saying, he hoped he knew his rank better than to presume to take place of a Doctor in Divinity. I mention such little anecdotes, merely to show the peculiar turn and habit of his mind.

—*The Life.* 1770. Dr. Maxwell's *Collectanea*.

Though of no high extraction himself, he had much respect for birth and family, especially among ladies. He said, "Adventitious accomplishments may be possessed by all ranks; but one may easily distinguish the *born gentleman*."

—*The Life.* 1770. Dr. Maxwell's *Collectanea*.

In the morning we had talked of old families, and the respect due to them. JOHNSON: "Sir, you have a right to that kind of respect, and are arguing for yourself. I am for supporting the principle, and am disinterested in doing it, as I have no such right." BOSWELL: "Why, Sir, it is one more incitement to a man to do well". JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, and it is a matter of opinion very necessary to keep society together. What is it but opinion, by which we have a respect for authority, that prevents us, who are the rabble, from rising up and pulling down you who are gentlemen from your places, and saying, 'We will be gentlemen in our turn!' Now, Sir, that respect for authority is much more easily granted to a man whose father has had it, than to an upstart,

and so society is more easily supported."

BOSWELL: "Perhaps, Sir, it might be done by the respect belonging to office, as among the Romans, where the dress, the *toga*, inspired reverence". JOHNSON: "Why, we know very little about the Romans. But, surely, it is much easier to respect a man who has always had respect, than to respect a man whom we know was last year no better than ourselves, and will be no better next year. In Republics there is no respect to authority, but a fear of power."

BOSWELL: "At present, Sir, I think riches seem to gain most respect". JOHNSON: "No, Sir, riches do not gain hearty respect; they only procure external attention. A very rich man, from low beginnings, may buy his election in a borough; but, *ceteris paribus*, a man of family will be preferred. People will prefer a man for whose father their fathers have voted, though they should get no more money, or even less. That shows that the respect for family is not merely fanciful, but has an actual operation. If gentlemen of family would allow the rich upstarts to spend their money profusely, which they are ready enough to do, and not vie with them in expense, the upstarts would soon be at an end, and the gentlemen would remain; but if the gentlemen will vie in expense with the upstarts, which is very foolish, they must be ruined."

—*The Life*. 1772, March 21st.

I told him that Mrs. Macaulay said, she wondered how he could reconcile his political

principles with his moral: his notions of inequality and subordination with wishing well to the happiness of all mankind who might live so agreeably, had they all their portions of land, and none to domineer over another. JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, I reconcile my principles very well, because mankind are happier in a state of inequality and subordination. Were they to be in this pretty state of equality, they would soon degenerate into brutes;—they would become Monboddos's nation:—their tails would grow. Sir, all would be losers, were all to work for all: they would have no intellectual improvement. All intellectual improvement arises from leisure; all leisure arises from one working for another."

—*The Life*. 1773, April 13th.

"Supposing, what I think cannot be proved, that a popular election of ministers were to be desired, our desires are not the measures of equity. It were to be desired that power should be only in the hands of the merciful, and riches in the possession of the generous; but the law must leave both riches and power where it finds them: and must often leave riches with the covetous, and power with the cruel. Convenience may be a rule in little things, where no other rule has been established; but as the great end of government is to give every man his own, no inconvenience is greater than that of making right uncertain. Nor is any man more an enemy to public peace, than he who fills weak heads with imaginary claims, and breaks the series of civil subordina-

tion, by inciting the lower classes of mankind to encroach upon the higher."

—*The Life*. 1773, May 1st.

I dined with Dr. Johnson at General Paoli's. He was obliged, by indisposition, to leave the company early; he appointed me, however, to meet him in the evening at Mr. (now Sir Robert) Chambers's in the Temple, where he accordingly came, though he continued to be very ill. Chambers, as is common on such occasions, prescribed various remedies to him. JOHNSON (fretted by pain): "Prythee don't tease me. Stay till I am well, and then you shall tell me how to cure myself." He grew better, and talked with a noble enthusiasm of keeping up the representation of respectable families. His zeal on this subject was a circumstance in his character exceedingly remarkable, when it is considered that he himself had no pretensions to blood. I heard him once say, "I have great merit in being zealous for subordination and the honours of birth; for I can hardly tell who was my grandfather." He maintained the dignity and propriety of male succession, in opposition to the opinion of one of our friends, who had that day employed Mr. Chambers to draw his will, devising his estate to his three sisters, in preference to a remote heir male. Johnson called them "*three dow-dies*", and said, with as high a spirit as the boldest Baron in the most perfect days of the feudal system, "An ancient estate should always go to males. It is mighty foolish to let a

stranger have it because he marries your daughter, and takes your name. As for an estate newly acquired by trade, you may give it, if you will, to the dog *Towser*, and let him keep his *own* name."

—*The Life*. 1773, May 9th.

I regretted the decay of respect for men of family, and that a Nabob now would carry an election from them. JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, the Nabob will carry it by means of his wealth, in a country where money is highly valued, as it must be where nothing can be had without money; but, if it comes to personal preference, the man of family will always carry it. There is generally a *scoundrelism* about a low man." Mr. Boyd said that was a good *ism*.

I said, I believed mankind were happier in the ancient feudal state of subordination, than they are in the modern state of independency. JOHNSON: "To be sure, the *Chief* was: but we must think of the number of individuals. That *they* were less happy, seems plain; for that state from which all escape as soon as they can, and to which none return after they have left it, must be less happy; and this is the case with the state of dependence on a chief or great man."

I mentioned the happiness of the French in their subordination, by the reciprocal benevolence and attachment between the great and those in lower rank. Mr. Boyd gave us an instance of their gentlemanly spirit. An old *Chevalier de Malthe*, of ancient *noblesse*, but in low circumstances, was in a coffee-house at

Paris, where was Julien, the great manufacturer at the Gobelins, of the fine tapestry, so much distinguished both for the figures and the colours. The chevalier's carriage was very old. Says Julien, with a plebeian insolence, "I think, Sir, you had better have your carriage new painted." The chevalier looked at him with indignant contempt, and answered, "Well, Sir, you may take it home and *dye* it!" All the coffee-house rejoiced at Julien's confusion.

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 25th.

I told Dr. Johnson I was in some difficulty how to act at Inveraray. I had reason to think that the Duchess of Argyle disliked me, on account of my zeal in the Douglas cause; but the Duke of Argyle had always been pleased to treat me with great civility. They were now at the castle, which is a very short walk from our inn; and the question was, whether I should go and pay my respects there. Dr. Johnson, to whom I had stated the case, was clear that I ought; but, in his usual way, he was very shy of discovering a desire to be invited there himself. Though from a conviction of the benefit of subordination to society, he has always shown great respect to persons of high rank when he happened to be in their company, yet his pride of character has ever made him guard against any appearance of courting the great. Besides, he was impatient to go to Glasgow, where he expected letters. At the same time he was, I believe, secretly not unwilling to have attention paid him by so great a Chieftain, and so exalted

a nobleman. He insisted that I should not go to the castle this day before dinner, as it would look like seeking an invitation. "But," said I, "if the duke invites us to dine with him to-morrow, shall we accept?" "Yes, Sir," I think he said, "to be sure. But," he added, "he won't ask us!" I mentioned, that I was afraid my company might be disagreeable to the duchess. He treated this objection with a manly disdain: "*That*, Sir, he must settle with his wife."

—*The Tour*. 1773, Oct. 24th.

After coffee, we went to afternoon service in St. Clement's church. Observing some beggars in the street as we walked along, I said to him I supposed there was no civilized country in the world where the misery of want in the lowest classes of the people was prevented. JOHNSON: "I believe, Sir, there is not; but it is better that some should be unhappy, than that none should be happy, which would be the case in a general state of equality". —*The Life*. 1776, April 7th.

We dined together with Mr. Scott (now Sir William Scott), his Majesty's Advocate-General, at his chambers in the Temple; nobody else there. The company being small, Johnson was not in such spirits as he had been the preceding day, and for a considerable time little was said. At last he burst forth: "Subordination is sadly broken down in this age. No man, now, has the same authority which his father had,—except a gaoler. No master has it over his servants; it is diminished in our colleges; nay,

in our grammar schools." BOSWELL: "What is the cause of this, Sir?" JOHNSON: "Why, the coming in of the Scotch" (laughing sarcastically). BOSWELL: "That is to say, things have been turned topsy-turvy. But your serious cause?" JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, there are many causes, the chief of which is, I think, the great increase of money. No man now depends upon the Lord of a Manor, when he can send to another country, and fetch provisions. The shoeblack at the entry of my court does not depend on me. I can deprive him but of a penny a day, which he hopes somebody else will bring him; and that penny I must carry to another shoeblack; so the trade suffers nothing. I have explained, in my *Journey to the Hebrides*, how gold and silver destroy feudal subordination. But, besides, there is a general relaxation of reverence. No son now depends upon his father, as in former times. Paternity used to be considered as of itself a great thing, which had a right to many claims. That is, in general, reduced to very small bounds. My hope is, that as anarchy produces tyranny, this extreme relaxation will produce *freni strictio*."

—*The Life*. 1778, April 10th.

BOSWELL: "I drank chocolate, Sir, this morning with Mr. Eld; and, to my no small surprise, found him to be a *Staffordshire Whig*, a being which I did not believe had existed". JOHNSON: "Sir, there are rascals in all countries". BOSWELL: "Eld said, a Tory was a creature generated between a nonjuring parson

and one's grandmother". JOHNSON: "And I have always said, the first Whig was the Devil". BOSWELL: "He certainly was, Sir. The Devil was impatient of subordination; he was the first who resisted power:—

‘Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven’."

—*The Life*. 1778, April 28th.

As he was a zealous friend of subordination, he was at all times watchful to repress the vulgar cant against the manners of the great. "High people, sir," said he, "are the best; take a hundred ladies of quality, you'll find them better wives, better mothers, more willing to sacrifice their own pleasure to their children, than a hundred other women. Tradeswomen (I mean the wives of tradesmen) in the city, who are worth from £10,000 to £15,000, are the worst creatures upon the earth, grossly ignorant, and thinking viciousness fashionable. Farmers, I think, are often worthless fellows. Few lords will cheat; and if they do, they'll be ashamed of it; farmers cheat, and are not ashamed of it; they have all the sensual vices too of the nobility, with cheating into the bargain. There is as much fornication and adultery amongst farmers as amongst noblemen." BOSWELL: "The notion of the world, Sir, however, is that the morals of women of quality are worse than those in lower stations". JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, the licentiousness of one woman of quality makes more noise than that of a number of women in lower stations; then,

Sir, you are to consider the malignity of women in the city against women of quality, which will make them believe anything of them—such as that they call their coachman to bed. No, sir; so far as I have observed, the higher in rank, the richer ladies are, they are the better instructed and the more virtuous.”

—*The Life*. 1778, May 13th.

Lord Graham commended Dr. Drummond at Naples as a man of extraordinary talents; and added that he had a great love of liberty. JOHNSON: “He is *young*, my Lord” (looking to his Lordship with an arch smile); “all *boys* love liberty, till experience convinces them they are not so fit to govern themselves as they imagined. We are all agreed as to our own liberty: we would have as much of it as we can get; but we are not agreed as to the liberty of others: for in proportion as we take, others must lose. I believe we hardly wish that the mob should have liberty to govern us. When that was the case some time ago, no man was at liberty not to have candles in his windows.” RAMSAY: “The result is, that order is better than confusion”. JOHNSON: “The result is, that order cannot be had but by subordination”.

—*The Life*. 1779, April 8th.

One observation which Johnson makes in Swift's *Life* should be often inculcated: “It may be justly supposed, that there was in his conversation, what appears so frequently in his letters, an affectation of familiarity with the

great, an ambition of momentary equality, sought and enjoyed by the neglect of those ceremonies which custom has established as the barriers between one order of society and another. This transgression of regularity was by himself and his admirers termed greatness of soul; but a great mind disdains to hold anything by courtesy, and therefore never usurps what a lawful claimant may take away. He that encroaches on another's dignity, puts himself in his power; he is either repelled with helpless indignity, or endured by clemency and condescension."

—*The Life*. 1781.

On Saturday, April 7th, I dined with him at Mr. Hoole's, with Governor Bouchier and Captain Orme, both of whom had been long in the East Indies; and being men of good sense and observation, were very entertaining. Johnson defended the Oriental regulation of different *castes* of men, which was objected to as totally destructive of the hopes of rising in society by personal merit. He showed that there was a *principle* in it sufficiently plausible by analogy. "We see," said he, "in metals that there are different species; and so likewise in animals, though one species may not differ very widely from another, as in the species of dogs,—the cur, the spaniel, and the mastiff. The Brahmins are the mastiffs of mankind."

—*The Life*. 1781, April 7th.

LIBERTY AND SEDITION

It is worthy of remark, in justice to Johnson's political character, which has been misrepresented as abjectly submissive to power, that his *Observations on the present State of Affairs* glow with as animated a spirit of Constitutional liberty as can be found anywhere. Thus he begins: "The time is now come, in which every Englishman expects to be informed of the national affairs; and in which he has a right to have that expectation gratified. For, whatever may be urged by Ministers, or those whom vanity or interest make the followers of Ministers, concerning the necessity of confidence in our governors, and the presumption of prying with profane eyes into the recesses of policy, it is evident that this reverence can be claimed only by counsels yet unexecuted, and projects suspended in deliberation. But when a design has ended in miscarriage or success, when every eye and every ear is witness to general discontent, or general satisfaction, it is then a proper time to disentangle confusion and illustrate obscurity; to show by what causes every event was produced, and in what effects it is likely to terminate; to lay down with distant particularity what rumour always huddles in general exclamation, or perplexes by indigested narratives; to show whence happiness or calamity is derived, and whence it may be expected; and honestly to lay before the

people what inquiry can gather of the past, and conjecture can estimate of the future."

Here we have it assumed as an incontrovertible principle, that in this country the people are the superintendents of the conduct and measures of those by whom Government is administered; of the beneficial effect of which the present reign afforded an illustrious example, when addresses from all parts of the kingdom controlled an audacious attempt to introduce a new power subversive of the Crown.

A still stronger proof of his patriotic spirit appears in his review of an *Essay on Waters*, by Dr. Lucas, of whom, after describing him as a man well known to the world for his daring defiance of power, when he thought it exerted on the side of wrong, he thus speaks:—

"The Irish Ministers drove him from his native country by a proclamation, in which they charge him with crimes of which they never intended to be called to the proof, and oppressed him by methods equally irresistible by guilt and innocence. Let the man thus driven into exile for having been the friend of his country, be received in every other place as a confessor of liberty; and let the tools of power be taught in time, that they may rob but cannot impoverish."

Some of his reviews in this Magazine [*The Literary Magazine, or Universal Review*] are very short accounts of the pieces noticed; and I mention them only that Dr. Johnson's opinion of the works may be known; but

many of them are examples of elaborate criticism in the most masterly style. In his review of the *Memoirs of the Court of Augustus*, he has the resolution to think and speak from his own mind, regardless of the cant transmitted from age to age in praise of the ancient Romans. Thus: "I know not why anyone but a schoolboy in his declamation should whine over the Commonwealth of Rome, which grew great only by the misery of the rest of mankind. The Romans, like others, as soon as they grew rich, grew corrupt; and in their corruption, sold the lives and freedoms of themselves, and of one another." Again—"A people who, while they were poor, robbed mankind; and as soon as they became rich, robbed one another." —*The Life*. 1756.

Speaking of one who, with more than ordinary boldness, attacked public measures and the Royal Family, he said, "I think he is safe from the law, but he is an abusive scoundrel: and instead of applying to my Lord Chief Justice to punish him, I would send half a dozen footmen, and have him well ducked.

"The notion of liberty amuses the people of England, and helps to keep off the *tædium vitæ*. When a butcher tells you that *his heart bleeds for his country*, he has, in fact, no uneasy feeling." —*The Life*. 1763, May 16th.

Goldsmith, as usual, endeavoured with too much eagerness to *shine*, and disputed very warmly with Johnson against the well-known

maxim of the British Constitution, "the King can do no wrong"; affirming, that "what was morally false could not be politically true; and as the King might, in the exercise of his regal power, command and cause the doing of what was wrong, it certainly might be said, in sense and in reason, that he could do wrong." JOHN-SON: "Sir, you are to consider that in our Constitution, according to its true principles, the King is the head, he is supreme; he is above everything, and there is no power by which he can be tried. Therefore, it is, Sir, that we hold the King can do no wrong; that whatever may happen to be wrong in government may not be above our reach by being ascribed to Majesty. Redress is always to be had against oppression by punishing the immediate agents. The King, though he should command, cannot force a judge to condemn a man unjustly; therefore it is the judge whom we prosecute and punish. Political institutions are formed upon the consideration of what will most frequently tend to the good of the whole, although now and then exceptions may occur. Thus it is better in general that a nation should have a supreme Legislative power, although it may at times be abused. And then, Sir, there is this consideration, that *if the abuse be enormous, nature will rise up, and claiming her original rights, overturn a corrupt political system.*" I mark this animated sentence with peculiar pleasure, as a noble instance of that truly dignified spirit of freedom which ever glowed in his heart, though he was

charged with slavish tenets by superficial observers, because he was at all times indignant against that false patriotism, that pretended love of freedom, that unruly restlessness which is inconsistent with the stable authority of any good government.

This generous sentiment, which he uttered with great fervour, struck me exceedingly, and stirred my blood to that pitch of fancied resistance, the possibility of which I am glad to keep in mind, but to which I trust I never shall be forced. —*The Life*. 1763, July 6th.

He talked in his usual style with a rough contempt of popular liberty. “They make a rout about *universal* liberty, without considering that all that is to be valued, or indeed can be enjoyed by individuals, is *private* liberty. Political liberty is good only so far as it produces private liberty. Now, Sir, there is the liberty of the press, which you know is a constant topic. Suppose you and I and two hundred more were restrained from printing our thoughts; what then? What proportion would that restraint upon us bear to the private happiness of the nation?”

This mode of representing the inconveniences of restraint as light and insignificant, was a kind of sophistry in which he delighted to indulge himself, in opposition to the extreme laxity for which it has been fashionable for too many to argue, when it is evident, upon reflection, that the very essence of government is restraint; and certain it is, that as government

produces rational happiness, too much restraint is better than too little. But when restraint is unnecessary, and so close as to gall those who are subject to it, the people may and ought to remonstrate; and, if relief is not granted, to resist. Of this manly and spirited principle, no man was more convinced than Johnson himself.

—*The Life*. 1768, May.

Politics being mentioned, he said: "This petitioning is a new mode of distressing Government, and a mighty easy one. I will undertake to get petitions either against quarter guineas, or half guineas, with the help of a little hot wine. There must be no yielding to encourage this. The object is not important enough. We are not to blow up half a dozen palaces, because one cottage is burning."

—*The Life*. 1769, Oct. 16th.

In 1770, he published a political pamphlet, entitled, *The False Alarm*, intended to justify the conduct of the Ministry and their majority in the House of Commons, for having virtually assumed it as an axiom that the expulsion of a member of Parliament was equivalent to exclusion, and thus having declared Colonel Luttrell to be duly elected for the county of Middlesex, notwithstanding Mr. Wilkes had a great majority of votes. This being justly considered as a gross violation of the right of election, an alarm for the Constitution extended itself all over the kingdom. To prove this alarm to be false was the purpose of Johnson's pamphlet;

but even his vast powers are inadequate to cope with Constitutional truth and reason, and his argument failed of effect; and the House of Commons have since expunged the offensive resolution from their Journals. That the House of Commons might have expelled Mr. Wilkes repeatedly, and as often as he should be re-chosen, was not denied; but incapacitation cannot be but by an act of the whole Legislature. It was wonderful to see how a prejudice in favour of government in general, and an aversion to popular clamour, could blind and contract such an understanding as Johnson's, in this particular case; yet the wit, the sarcasm, the eloquent vivacity which this pamphlet displayed, made it be read with great avidity at the time, and it will ever be read with pleasure, for the sake of its composition. That it endeavoured to infuse a narcotic indifference, as to public concerns, into the minds of the people, and that it broke out sometimes into an extreme coarseness of contemptuous abuse, is but too evident.

It must not, however, be omitted, that when the storm of his violence subsides, he takes a fair opportunity to pay a grateful compliment to the King, who had rewarded his merit:

“These low-born railers have endeavoured, surely without effect, to alienate the affections of the people from the only King who, for almost a century, has much appeared to desire, or much endeavoured to deserve them.” And, “Every honest man must lament, that the faction has been regarded with frigid neutrality

by the Tories, who, being long accustomed to signalize their principles by opposition to the Court, do not yet consider, that they have at last a King who knows not the name of party, and who wishes to be the common father of all his people."

To this pamphlet, which was at once discovered to be Johnson's, several answers came out, in which care was taken to remind the public of his former attacks upon Government, and of his now being a pensioner, without allowing for the honourable terms upon which Johnson's pension was granted and accepted, or the change of system which the British Court had undergone upon the accession of his present Majesty. He was, however, soothed in the highest strain of panegyric, in a poem called "The Remonstrance", by the Rev. Mr. Stockdale, to whom he was, upon many occasions, a kind protector.

—*The Life.* 1770.

He went with me, one Sunday, to hear my old master, Gregory Sharpe, preach at the Temple.—In the prefatory prayer, Sharpe ranted about *liberty*, as a blessing most fervently to be implored, and its continuance prayed for. Johnson observed, that our *liberty* was in no sort of danger: he would have done much better to pray against our *licentiousness*.

—*The Life.* 1770. Dr. Maxwell's *Collectanea*.

He said, "the poor in England were better provided for than in any other country of the

same extent: he did not mean little Cantons or petty Republics. Where a great proportion of the people," said he, "are suffered to languish in helpless misery, that country must be ill policed, and wretchedly governed: a decent provision for the poor is the true test of civilization.—Gentlemen of education," he observed, "were pretty much the same in all countries: the condition of the lower orders, the poor especially, was the true mark of national discrimination."

When the corn-laws were in agitation in Ireland, by which that country has been enabled not only to feed itself, but to export corn to a large amount, Sir Thomas Robinson observed that those laws might be prejudicial to the corn-trade of England. "Sir 'Thomas," said he, "you talk the language of a savage: what, Sir, would you prevent any people from feeding themselves, if by any honest means they can do it?"

—*The Life*. 1770. Dr. Maxwell's *Collectanea*.

Sir Adam suggested, that luxury corrupts a people, and destroys the spirit of liberty. JOHNSON: "Sir, that is all visionary. I would not give half a guinea to live under one form of government rather than another. It is of no moment to the happiness of an individual. Sir, the danger of the abuse of power is nothing to a private man. What Frenchman is prevented from passing his life as he pleases?" SIR ADAM: "But, Sir, in the British Constitution it is surely of importance to keep up a spirit in

the people, so as to preserve a balance against the Crown". JOHNSON: "Sir, I perceive you are a vile Whig.—Why all this childish jealousy of the power of the Crown? The Crown has not power enough. When I say that all governments are alike, I consider that in no government can power be abused long. Mankind will not bear it. If a sovereign oppresses his people to a great degree, they will rise and cut off his head. There is a remedy in human nature against tyranny, that will keep us safe under every form of government. Had not the people of France thought themselves honoured in sharing in the brilliant actions of Louis XIV., they would not have endured him; and we may say the same of the King of Prussia's people." Sir Adam introduced the ancient Greeks and Romans. JOHNSON: "Sir, the mass of both of them were barbarians. The mass of every people must be barbarous where there is no printing, and consequently knowledge is not generally diffused. Knowledge is diffused among our people by the newspapers." Sir Adam mentioned the orators, poets, and artists of Greece. JOHNSON: "Sir, I am talking of the mass of the people. We see even what the boasted Athenians were. The little effect which Demosthenes's orations had upon them shows that they were barbarians."

—*The Life*. 1772, March 31st.

We talked of the King's coming to see Goldsmith's new play.—"I wish he would," said Goldsmith; adding, however, with an affected

indifference, "Not that it would do me the least good." JOHNSON: "Well then, Sir, let us say it would do *him* good" (laughing). "No, Sir, this affectation will not pass: it is mighty idle. In such a state as ours who would not wish to please the Chief Magistrate?" GOLDSMITH: "I *do* wish to please him. I remember a line in Dryden,

'And every poet is the monarch's friend'.

It ought to be reversed." JOHNSON: "Nay, there are finer lines in Dryden on the subject:—

'For colleges on bounteous kings depend,
And never rebel was to arts a friend.'

General Paoli observed, that successful rebels might. MARTINELLI: "Happy rebellions". GOLDSMITH: "We have no such phrase". GENERAL PAOLI: "But have you not the *thing*?" GOLDSMITH: "Yes, all our *happy* revolutions. They have hurt our constitution, and will hurt it, till we mend it by another HAPPY REVOLUTION." I never before discovered that my friend Goldsmith had so much of the old prejudice in him. —*The Life*. 1773, April 15th.

We dined at Kinghorn, and then got into a post-chaise. Mr. Nairne and his servant, and Joseph, rode by us. We stopped at Cupar, and drank tea. We talked of Parliament; and I said I supposed very few of the members knew much of what was going on, as indeed very few gentlemen know much of their private

affairs. JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, if a man is not of a sluggish mind, he may be his own steward. If he will look into his affairs, he will soon learn. So it is as to public affairs. There must always be a certain number of men of business in Parliament." BOSWELL: "But consider, Sir; what is the House of Commons? Is not a great part of it chosen by peers? Do you think, Sir, they ought to have such an influence?" JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, influence must ever be in proportion to property; and it is right it should". BOSWELL: "But is there not reason to fear that the common people may be oppressed?" JOHNSON: "No, Sir, our great fear is from want of power in Government. Such a storm of vulgar force has broke in." BOSWELL: "It has only roared". JOHNSON: "Sir, it has roared, till the Judges in Westminster Hall have been afraid to pronounce sentence in opposition to the popular cry. You are frightened by what is no longer dangerous, like Presbyterians by Popery." He then repeated a passage, I think, in Butler's *Remains*, which ends, "And would cry, Fire! Fire! in Noah's flood". —*The Tour*. 1773, Aug. 18th.

There is neither justice of peace nor constable in Rasay. Sky has Mr. M'Cleod of Ulinish, who is the sheriff-substitute, and no other justice of peace. The want of the execution of justice is much felt among the islanders. M'Cleod very sensibly observed, that taking away the heritable jurisdictions had not been of such service in the islands, as was imagined.

They had not authority enough in lieu of them. What could formerly have been settled at once, must now either take much time and trouble, or be neglected. Dr. Johnson said: "A country is in a bad state, which is governed only by laws; because a thousand things occur for which laws cannot provide, and where authority ought to interpose. Now destroying the authority of the chiefs set the people loose. It did not pretend to bring any positive good, but only to cure some evil; and I am not well enough acquainted with the country to know what degree of evil the heritable jurisdiction occasioned." I maintained hardly any; because the chiefs generally acted right, for their own sakes.

—*The Tour*. 1773, Sept. 11th.

When I returned to the inn, I informed Dr. Johnson of the Duke of Argyle's invitation, with which he was much pleased, and readily accepted of it. We talked of a violent contest which was then carrying on, with a view to the next general election for Ayrshire; where one of the candidates, in order to undermine the old and established interest, had artfully held himself out as a champion for the independency of the county against aristocratic influence, and had persuaded several gentlemen into a resolution to oppose every candidate who was supported by peers. "Foolish fellows!" said Dr. Johnson, "don't they see that they are as much dependent upon the peers one way as the other? The peers have but to *oppose* a candidate, to ensure him success. It is said,

the only way to make a pig go forward, is to pull him back by the tail. These people must be treated like pigs."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Oct. 24th.

Patriotism having become one of our topics, Johnson suddenly uttered, in a strong determined tone, an apophthegm, at which many will start: "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel". But let it be considered, that he did not mean a real and generous love of our country, but that pretended patriotism which so many, in all ages and countries, have made a cloak for self-interest. I maintained, that certainly all patriots were not scoundrels. Being urged (not by Johnson), to name one exception, I mentioned an eminent person, whom we all greatly admired. JOHNSON: "Sir, I do not say that he is *not* honest; but we have no reason to conclude from his political conduct that he *is* honest. Were he to accept a place from this Ministry, he would lose that character of firmness which he has, and might be turned out of his place in a year. This Ministry is neither stable, nor grateful to their friends, as Sir Robert Walpole was: so that he may think it more for his interest to take his chance of his party coming in."

—*The Life.* 1775, April 7th.

Johnson arraigned the modern politics of this country, as entirely devoid of all principle of whatever kind. "Politics," said he, "are now

nothing more than means of rising in the world. With this sole view do men engage in politics, and their whole conduct proceeds upon it. How different in that respect is the state of the nation now from what it was in the time of Charles the First, during the Usurpation, and after the Restoration, in the time of Charles the Second. *Hudibras* affords a strong proof how much hold political principles had then upon the minds of men. There is in *Hudibras* a great deal of bullion which will always last. But, to be sure, the brightest strokes of his wit owed their force to the impression of the characters, which was upon men's minds at the time; to their knowing them, at table and in the street; in short, being familiar with them; and above all, to his satire being directed against those whom a little while before they had hated and feared. The nation in general has ever been loyal, has been at all times attached to the monarch, though a few daring rebels have been wonderfully powerful for a time. The murder of Charles the First was undoubtedly not committed with the approbation or consent of the people; had that been the case, Parliament would not have ventured to consign the regicides to their deserved punishment; and we know what exuberance of joy there was when Charles the Second was restored. If Charles the Second had bent all his mind to it, had made it his sole object, he might have been as absolute as Louis the Fourteenth." A gentleman observed, he would have done no harm if he had. JOHNSON: "Why,

Sir, absolute princes seldom do any harm. But they who are governed by them are governed by chance. There is no security for good government." CAMBRIDGE: "There have been many sad victims to absolute government". JOHNSON: "So, Sir, have there been to popular factions". BOSWELL: "The question is, which is worst, one wild beast or many?"

—*The Life*. 1775, April 11th.

He entered upon the state of the nation, and thus discoursed: "Sir, the great misfortune now is, that Government has too little power. All that it has to bestow must of necessity be given to support itself; so that it cannot reward merit. No man, for instance, can now be made a bishop for his learning and piety; his only chance for promotion is his being connected with somebody who has Parliamentary interest. Our several Ministers in this reign have outbid each other in concessions to the people. Lord Bute, though a very honourable man,—a man who meant well,—a man who had his blood full of prerogative,—was a theoretical statesman, — a book-minister, — and thought this country could be governed by the influence of the Crown alone. Then, Sir, he gave up a great deal. He advised the King to agree that the judges should hold their places for life, instead of losing them at the accession of a new king. Lord Bute, I suppose, thought to make the King popular by this concession; but the people never minded it; and it was a most impolitic measure.

“Lord Bute advised the King to give up a very large sum of money, for which nobody thanked him. It was of consequence to the King, but nothing to the public, among whom it was divided. When I say Lord Bute advised, I mean, that such acts were done when he was Minister, and we are to suppose that he advised them. There is now no Prime Minister; there is only an agent for Government in the House of Commons. We are governed by the Cabinet; but there is no one head there since Sir Robert Walpole’s time.” BOSWELL: “What then, Sir, is the use of Parliament?” JOHNSON: “Why, Sir, Parliament is a large council to the King; and the advantage of such a council is, having a great number of men of property concerned in the Legislature, who, for their own interest, will not consent to bad laws. And you must have observed, Sir, the Administration is feeble and timid, and cannot act with that authority and resolution which is necessary. Were I in power, I would turn out every man who dared to oppose me. Government has the distribution of offices, that it may be enabled to maintain its authority.

“Lord Bute,” he added, “took down too fast, without building up something new.” BOSWELL: “Because, Sir, he found a rotten building. The political coach was drawn by a set of bad horses; it was necessary to change them.” JOHNSON: “But he should have changed them one by one”.

—*The Life*. 1775, April 14th.

He praised the ladies of the present age, insisting that they were more faithful to their husbands, and more virtuous in every respect, than in former times, because their understandings were better cultivated. It was an undoubted proof of his good sense and good disposition, that he was never querulous, never prone to inveigh against the present times, as is so common when superficial minds are on the fret. On the contrary, he was willing to speak favourably of his own age; and, indeed, maintained its superiority in every respect, except in its reverence for government; the relaxation of which he imputed as its grand cause, to the shock which our monarchy received at the Revolution, though necessary; and secondly, to the timid concessions made to faction by successive Administrations in the reign of his present Majesty. I am happy to think that he lived to see the Crown at last recover its just influence. —*The Life*. 1776, March 28th.

Of a person who differed from him in politics, he said: "In private life he is a very honest gentleman; but I will not allow him to be so in public life. People *may* be honest, though they are doing wrong: that is between their Maker and them. But *we*, who are suffering by their pernicious conduct, are to destroy them. We are sure that [Burke] acts from interest. We know what his genuine principles were. They who allow their passions to confound the distinctions between right and wrong, are criminal. They may be convinced: but

they have not come honestly by their conviction.

“The mode of government by one may be ill adapted to a small society, but is best for a great nation. The characteristic of our own Government at present is imbecility. The magistrates dare not call the Guards for fear of being hanged. The Guards will not come for fear of being given up to the blind rage of popular juries.” —*The Life*. 1776, April 26th.

Early in this year came out, in two volumes quarto, the posthumous works of the learned Dr. Zachary Pearce, Bishop of Rochester; being, *A Commentary, with Notes, on the Four Evangelists and the Acts of the Apostles*, with other theological pieces. Johnson had now an opportunity of making a grateful return to that excellent prelate, who, we have seen, was the only person who gave him any assistance in the compilation of his *Dictionary*. The Bishop had left some account of his life and character, written by himself. To this Johnson made some valuable additions, and furnished to the editor, the Reverend Mr. Derby, a Dedication, which I shall here insert, both because it will appear at this time with peculiar propriety, and because it will tend to propagate and increase that “fervour of *loyalty*”, which in me, who boast of the name of *Tory*, is not only a principle but a passion.

“TO THE KING

“SIR,

“I presume to lay before your Majesty the last labours of a learned Bishop who died in the toils and duties of his calling. He is now beyond the reach of all earthly honours and rewards; and only the hope of inciting others to imitate him, makes it now fit to be remembered that he enjoyed in his life the favour of your Majesty.

“The tumultuary life of Princes seldom permits them to survey the wide extent of national interest without losing sight of private merit; to exhibit qualities which may be imitated by the highest and the humblest of mankind; and to be at once amiable and great.

“Such characters, if now and then they appear in history, are contemplated with admiration. May it be the ambition of all your subjects to make haste with their tribute of reverence; and as posterity may learn from your Majesty how kings should live, may they learn likewise from your people how they should be honoured. I am, may it please your Majesty,

“With the most profound respect,

“Your Majesty’s most dutiful and devoted
“Subject and servant.”

—*The Life.* 1777.

Mr. Burke’s *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol, on the affairs of America*, being mentioned,

Johnson censured the composition much, and he ridiculed the definition of a free government, viz.—“For any practical purpose, it is what the people think so.”—“I will let the King of France govern me on those conditions,” said he, “for it is to be governed just as I please.” And when Dr. Taylor talked of a girl being sent to a parish workhouse, and asked how much she could be obliged to work, “Why,” said Johnson, “as much as is reasonable: and what is that? as much as *she thinks* reasonable.” —*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 22nd.

I talked of the corruption of the British Parliament, in which I alleged that any question, however unreasonable or unjust, might be carried by a venal majority; and I spoke with high admiration of the Roman Senate, as if composed of men sincerely desirous to resolve what they should think best for their country. My friend would allow no such character to the Roman Senate; and he maintained that the British Parliament was not corrupt, and that there was no occasion to corrupt its members; asserting, that there was hardly ever any question of great importance before Parliament, any question in which a man might not very well vote either upon one side or the other. He said, there had been none in his time except that respecting America.

—*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 23rd.

I told him that I was engaged as counsel at the bar of the House of Commons to oppose a

road bill in the county of Stirling, and asked him what mode he would advise me to follow in addressing such an audience. JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, you must provide yourself with a good deal of extraneous matter, which you are to produce occasionally, so as to fill up the time; for you must consider, that they do not listen much. If you begin with the strength of your cause, it may be lost before they begin to listen. When you catch a moment of attention, press the merits of the question upon them." He said, as to one point of the merits, that he thought "it would be a wrong thing to deprive the small landholders of the privilege of assessing themselves for making and repairing the high roads; *it was destroying a certain portion of liberty, without a good reason, which was always a bad thing.*" When I mentioned this observation next day to Mr. Wilkes, he pleasantly said, "What! does *he* talk of liberty? *Liberty* is as ridiculous in *his* mouth as *Religion* in *mine.*" Mr. Wilkes's advice as to the best mode of speaking at the Bar of the House of Commons was not more respectful towards the Senate, than that of Dr. Johnson: "Be as impudent as you can, as merry as you can, and say whatever comes uppermost. Jack Lee is the best heard there of any counsel; and he is the most impudent dog, and always abusing us."

—*The Life.* 1778, March 20th.

Talking of different governments,—JOHNSON: "The more contracted power is, the more easily it is destroyed. A country governed by

a despot is an inverted cone. Government there cannot be so firm, as when it rests upon a broad basis gradually contracted, as the government of Great Britain, which is founded on the Parliament, then is in the Privy-Council, then in the King." BOSWELL: "Power, when contracted into the person of the despot, may be easily destroyed, as the prince may be cut off. So Caligula wished that the people of Rome had but one neck, that he might cut them off at a blow." OGLETHORPE: "It was of the Senate he wished that. The Senate, by its usurpation, controlled both the Emperor and the people. And don't you think that we see too much of that in our own Parliament?"

—*The Life*. 1778, April 14th.

He said, "Lord Chatham was a Dictator; he possessed the power of putting the State in motion; now there is no power, all order is relaxed." BOSWELL: "Is there no hope of a change to the better?" JOHNSON: "Why, yes, Sir, when we are weary of this relaxation. So the City of London will appoint its Mayors again by seniority." BOSWELL: "But is not that taking a mere chance for having a good or a bad Mayor?" JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir; but the evil of competition is greater than that of the worst Mayor that can come; besides, there is no more reason to suppose that the choice of a rabble will be right, than that chance will be right."

—*The Life*. 1778, May 17th.

In one of Johnson's registers of this year,

there occurs the following curious passage :
“ Jan. 20. The Ministry is dissolved. I prayed with Francis, and gave thanks.” It has been the subject of discussion, whether there are two distinct particulars mentioned here? Or that we are to understand the giving of thanks to be in consequence of the dissolution of the Ministry? In support of the last of these conjectures may be urged his mean opinion of that Ministry, which has frequently appeared in the course of this work; and it is strongly confirmed by what he said on the subject to Mr. Seward :—
“ I am glad the Ministry is removed. Such a bunch of imbecility never disgraced a country. If they sent a messenger into the City to take up a printer, the messenger was taken up instead of the printer, and committed by the sitting alderman. If they sent one army to the relief of another, the first army was defeated and taken before the second arrived. I will not say that what they did was always wrong; but it was always done at a wrong time.”

—*The Life.* 1782, March 20th.

In the evening I came to him again. He was somewhat fretful from his illness. A gentleman asked him whether he had been abroad to-day. “ Don’t talk so childishly,” said he. “ You may as well ask if I hanged myself to-day.” I mentioned politics. JOHNSON : “ Sir, I’d as soon have a man to break my bones as talk to me of public affairs, internal or external. I have lived to see things all as bad as they can be.”

—*The Life.* 1783, March 23rd.

We talked of the accusation against a gentleman [Warren Hastings] for supposed delinquencies in India. JOHNSON: "What foundation there is for accusation I know not; but they will not get at him. Where bad actions are committed at so great a distance, a delinquent can obscure the evidence till the scent becomes cold: there is a cloud between which cannot be penetrated: therefore all distant power is bad. I am clear that the best plan for the government of India is a despotic governor; for if he be a good man, it is evidently the best government: and supposing him to be a bad man, it is better to have one plunderer than many. A governor, whose power is checked, lets others plunder, that he himself may be allowed to plunder; but if despotic, he sees that the more he lets others plunder, the less there will be for himself, so he restrains them; and though he himself plunders, the country is a gainer, compared with being plundered by numbers."

—*The Life*. 1783, April 28th.

Johnson's Prejudice against the Players

It is remarkable, that in this biographical disquisition [the *Life of Savage*] there appears a very strong symptom of Johnson's prejudice against players; a prejudice which may be attributed to the following causes: first, the imperfections of his organs, which were so defective that he was not susceptible of the fine impressions which theatrical excellence produces upon the generality of mankind; secondly, the cold rejection of his tragedy; and, lastly, the brilliant success of Garrick, who had been his pupil, who had come to London at the same time with him, not in a much more prosperous state than himself, and whose talents he undoubtedly rated low, compared with his own. His being outstripped by his pupil in the race of immediate fame, as well as of fortune, probably made him feel some indignation, as thinking that whatever might be Garrick's merits in his art, the reward was too great when compared with what the most successful efforts of literary labour could attain. At all periods of his life, Johnson used to talk contemptuously of players; but in this work he speaks of them with

peculiar acrimony; for which, perhaps, there was formerly too much reason from the licentious and dissolute manners of those engaged in that profession. It is but justice to add, that in our own time such a change has taken place, that there is no longer room for such an unfavourable distinction.

His schoolfellow and friend, Dr. Taylor, told me a pleasant anecdote of Johnson's triumphing over his pupil, David Garrick. When that great actor had played some little time at Goodman's Fields, Johnson and Taylor went to see him perform, and afterwards passed the evening at a tavern with him and old Giffard. Johnson, who was ever depreciating stage-players, after censuring some mistakes in emphasis, which Garrick had committed in the course of that night's acting, said, "The players, Sir, have got a kind of rant, with which they run on, without any regard either to accent or emphasis." Both Garrick and Giffard were offended at this sarcasm, and endeavoured to refute it; upon which Johnson rejoined, "Well, now, I'll give you something to speak, with which you are little acquainted, and then we shall see how just my observation is. That shall be the criterion. Let me hear you repeat the ninth Commandment, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour'." Both tried at it, said Dr. Taylor, and both mistook the emphasis, which should be upon *not* and *false witness*. Johnson put them right, and enjoyed his victory with great glee.

—*The Life*. 1744.

His *Vanity of Human Wishes* has less of common life, but more of a philosophic dignity than his *London*. More readers, therefore, will be delighted with the pointed spirit of *London*, than with the profound reflection of *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. Garrick, for instance, observed in his sprightly manner, with more vivacity than regard to just discrimination, as is usual with wits, "When Johnson lived much with the Herveys, and saw a good deal of what was passing in life, he wrote his *London*, which is lively and easy; when he became more retired, he gave us his *Vanity of Human Wishes*, which is as hard as Greek. Had he gone on to imitate another satire, it would have been as hard as Hebrew."

—*The Life*. 1749, January.

Garrick being now vested with theatrical power by being manager of Drury Lane Theatre, he kindly and generously made use of it to bring out Johnson's tragedy, which had been long kept back for want of encouragement. But in this benevolent purpose he met with no small difficulty from the temper of Johnson, which could not brook that a drama which he had formed with much study, and had been obliged to keep more than the nine years of Horace, should be revised and altered at the pleasure of an actor. Yet Garrick knew well, that without some alterations it would not be fit for the stage. A violent dispute having ensued between them, Garrick applied to the Reverend Dr. Taylor to interpose. Johnson

was at first very obstinate. "Sir," said he, "the fellow wants me to make Mahomet run mad, that he may have an opportunity of tossing his hands and kicking his heels." He was, however, at last, with difficulty, prevailed on to comply with Garrick's wishes, so as to allow of some changes ; but still there were not enough.

Dr. Adams was present the first night of the representation of *Irene*, and gave me the following account :—" Before the curtain drew up, there were catcalls and whistling, which alarmed Johnson's friends. The Prologue, which was written by himself in a manly strain, soothed the audience, and the play went off tolerably, till it came to the conclusion, when Mrs. Pritchard, the heroine of the piece, was to be strangled upon the stage, and was to speak two lines with the bow-string round her neck. The audience cried out '*Murder! Murder!*' She several times attempted to speak ; but in vain. At last she was obliged to go off the stage alive." This passage was afterwards struck out, and she was carried off to be put to death behind the scenes, as the play now has it. The Epilogue, as Johnson informed me, was written by Sir William Yonge. I know not how his play came to be thus graced by the pen of a person so eminent in the political world.

Notwithstanding all the support of such performers as Garrick, Barry, Mrs. Cibber, Mrs. Pritchard, and every advantage of dress and decoration, the tragedy of *Irene* did

not please the public. Mr. Garrick's zeal carried it through for nine nights, so that the author had his three nights' profit; and from a receipt signed by him, now in the hands of Mr. James Dodsley, it appears that his friend, Mr. Robert Dodsley, gave him one hundred pounds for the copy, with his usual reservation of the right of one edition.

Irene, considered as a poem, is entitled to the praise of superior excellence. Analysed into parts, it will furnish a rich store of noble sentiments, fine imagery, and beautiful language; but it is deficient in pathos, in that delicate power of touching the human feelings, which is the principal end of the drama. Indeed Garrick has complained to me that Johnson not only had not the faculty of producing the impressions of tragedy, but that he had not the sensibility to perceive them. His great friend Mr. Walmsley's prediction, that he would "turn out a fine tragedy-writer", was, therefore, ill-founded. Johnson was wise enough to be convinced that he had not the talents necessary to write successfully for the stage, and never made another attempt in that species of composition.

When asked how he felt upon the ill success of his tragedy, he replied, "Like the Monument;" meaning that he continued firm and unmoved as that column. And let it be remembered, as an admonition to the *genus irritabile* of dramatic writers, that this great man, instead of peevishly complaining of the bad taste of the town, submitted to its decision

without a murmur. He had, indeed, upon all occasions, a great deference for the general opinion: "A man," said he, "who writes a book, thinks himself wiser or wittier than the rest of mankind; he supposes that he can instruct or amuse them, and the public to whom he appeals must, after all, be the judges of his pretensions."

On occasion of this play being brought upon the stage, Johnson had a fancy that as a dramatic author his dress should be more gay than what he ordinarily wore; he therefore appeared behind the scenes, and even in one of the side boxes, in a scarlet waistcoat, with rich gold lace, and a gold laced hat. He humorously observed to Mr. Langton, "that when in that dress he could not treat people with the same ease as when in his usual plain clothes." Dress indeed, we must allow, has more effect even upon strong minds than one should suppose without having had the experience of it. His necessary attendance while his play was in rehearsal, and during its performance, brought him acquainted with many of the performers of both sexes, which produced a more favourable opinion of their profession than he had harshly expressed in his *Life of Savage*. With some of them he kept up an acquaintance as long as he and they lived, and was ever ready to show them acts of kindness. He, for a considerable time, used to frequent the *Green Room*, and seemed to take delight in dissipating his gloom, by mixing in the sprightly chit-chat of the motley circle then to be found there. Mr.

David Hume related to me from Mr. Garrick, that Johnson at last denied himself this amusement, from considerations of rigid virtue, saying, "I'll come no more behind your scenes, David; for the silk stockings and white bosoms of your actresses excite my amorous propensities." —*The Life*. 1749, Feb. 6th.

On the 6th of March came out Lord Bolingbroke's works, published by Mr. David Mallet. The wild and pernicious ravings, under the name of "Philosophy", which were thus ushered into the world, gave great offence to all well-principled men. Johnson, hearing of their tendency, which nobody disputed, was roused with a just indignation, and pronounced this memorable sentence upon the noble author and his editor: "Sir, he was a scoundrel and a coward: a scoundrel for charging a blunderbuss against religion and morality; a coward, because he had not resolution to fire it off himself, but left half a crown to a beggarly Scotchman, to draw the trigger after his death!" Garrick, who, I can attest from my own knowledge, had his mind seasoned with pious reverence, and sincerely disapproved of the infidel writings of several, whom in the course of his almost universal gay intercourse with men of eminence he treated with external civility, distinguished himself upon this occasion. Mr. Pelham having died on the very day on which Lord Bolingbroke's works came out, he wrote an elegant ode on his death, beginning

“Let others hail the rising sun,
I bow to that whose course is run!”

in which is the following stanza :—

“The same sad morn, to Church and State
(So for our sins ’t was fix’d by fate)
A double stroke was given ;
Black as the whirlwinds of the North,
St. John’s fell genius issued forth,
And Pelham’s fled to heaven.”

—*The Life*. 1754, March 6th.

“The two Wartons just looked into the town, and were taken to see *Cleone*, where David [Garrick] says, they were starved for want of company to keep them warm. David and Doddy have had a new quarrel, and, I think, cannot conveniently quarrel any more. *Cleone* was well acted by all the characters, but [Mrs.] Bellamy left nothing to be desired. I went the first night, and supported it as well as I might; for Doddy, you know, is my patron, and I would not desert him. The play was very well received. Doddy, after the danger was over, went every night to the stage-side, and cried at the distress of poor *Cleone*.”

—*The Life*. 1759, Jan. 9th.

He then addressed himself to Davies :
“What do you think of Garrick? He has refused me an order for the play for Miss Williams, because he knows the house will be full, and that an order would be worth three shillings.” Eager to take any opening to get into conversation with him, I ventured

to say, "O Sir, I cannot think Mr. Garrick would grudge such a trifle to you." "Sir," said he, with a stern look, "I have known David Garrick longer than you have done; and I know no right you have to talk to me on the subject." Perhaps I deserved this check; for it was rather presumptuous in me, an entire stranger, to express any doubt of the justice of his animadversion upon his old acquaintance and pupil. —*The Life*. 1763, May 16th.

"Colley Cibber, Sir, was by no means a blockhead, but by arrogating to himself too much, he was in danger of losing that degree of estimation to which he was entitled. His friends gave out that he *intended* his Birthday Odes should be bad: but that was not the case, Sir; for he kept them many months by him, and a few years before he died he showed me one of them, with great solicitude to render it as perfect as might be, and I made some corrections, to which he was not very willing to submit. I remember the following couplet in allusion to the King and himself:—

‘Perched on the eagle’s soaring wing,
The lowly linnet loves to sing.’

Sir, he had heard something of the fabulous tale of the wren sitting upon the eagle’s wing, and he had applied it to a linnet. Cibber’s familiar style, however, was better than that which Whitehead has assumed. *Grand* nonsense is insupportable. Whitehead is but a little man to inscribe verses to players.”

I did not presume to controvert this censure, which was tinctured with his prejudice against players; but I could not help thinking that a dramatic poet might with propriety pay a compliment to an eminent performer, as Whitehead has very happily done in his verses to Mr. Garrick. —*The Life*. 1763, June 25th.

Sir John Hawkins represents himself as a “*seceder*” from this society, and assigns as the reason of his “*withdrawing*” himself from it, that its late hours were inconsistent with his domestic arrangements. In this he is not accurate; for the fact was that he one evening attacked Mr. Burke in so rude a manner that all the company testified their displeasure, and at the next meeting his reception was such that he never came again.

He is equally inaccurate with respect to Mr. Garrick, of whom he says: “he trusted that the least intimation of a desire to come among us would procure him a ready admission; but in this he was mistaken. Johnson consulted me upon it, and when I could find no objection to receive him, exclaimed, ‘He will disturb us by his buffoonery;’ and afterwards so managed matters that he was never formally proposed, and, by consequence, never admitted.”

In justice both to Mr. Garrick and Dr. Johnson, I think it necessary to rectify this mis-statement. The truth is, that not very long after the institution of our club, Sir Joshua Reynolds was speaking of it to Garrick. “I like it much,” said he, “I think I shall be of

you." When Sir Joshua mentioned this to Dr. Johnson, he was much displeased with the actor's conceit. "*He'll be of us,*" said Johnson, "how does he know we will *permit* him? The first duke in England has no right to hold such language." However, when Garrick was regularly proposed some time afterwards, Johnson, though he had taken a momentary offence at his arrogance, warmly and kindly supported him, and he was accordingly elected, was a most agreeable member, and continued to attend our meetings to the time of his death.

Mrs. Piozzi has also given a similar misrepresentation of Johnson's treatment of Garrick in this particular, as if he had used these contemptuous expressions—"If Garrick *does* apply, I'll black-ball him.—Surely, one ought to sit in a society like ours,

‘Unelbow'd by a gamester, pimp, or player’."

I am happy to be enabled by such unquestionable authority as that of Sir Joshua Reynolds, as well as from my own knowledge, to vindicate at once the heart of Johnson and the social merit of Garrick.

—*The Life.* 1764, February.

I came to London in the autumn, and having informed him that I was going to be married in a few months, I wished to have as much of his conversation as I could before engaging in a state of life which would probably keep me more in Scotland, and prevent me seeing him

so often as when I was a single man; but I found he was at Brighthelmstone with Mr. and Mrs. Thrale. I was very sorry that I had not his company with me at the Jubilee, in honour of Shakespeare, at Stratford-upon-Avon, the great poet's native town. Johnson's connection both with Shakespeare and Garrick founded a double claim to his presence; and it would have been highly gratifying to Mr. Garrick. Upon this occasion I particularly lamented that he had not that warmth of friendship for his brilliant pupil, which we may suppose would have had a benignant effect on both. When almost every man of eminence in the literary world was happy to partake in this festival of genius, the absence of Johnson could not but be wondered at and regretted. The only trace of him there, was in the whimsical advertisement of a haberdasher, who sold *Shakespearian ribands* of various dyes; and, by way of illustrating their appropriation to the bard, introduced a line from the celebrated Prologue at the opening of Drury Lane Theatre:

“Each change of *many-coloured* life he drew”.

—*The Life*. 1769, September.

Johnson said, that the description of the temple, in *The Mourning Bride*, was the finest poetical passage he had ever read; he recollected none in Shakespeare equal to it.—“But,” said Garrick, all alarmed for “the god of his idolatry”, “we know not the extent and variety of his powers. We are to suppose there are

such passages in his works. Shakespeare must not suffer from the badness of our memories." Johnson, diverted by this enthusiastic jealousy, went on with great ardour: "No, Sir; Congreve has *nature*;" (smiling on the tragic eagerness of Garrick); but composing himself, he added: "Sir, this is not comparing Congreve on the whole with Shakespeare on the whole; but only maintaining that Congreve has one finer passage than any that can be found in Shakespeare. Sir, a man may have no more than ten guineas in the world, but he may have those ten guineas in one piece; and so may have a finer piece than a man who has ten thousand pounds: but then he has only one ten guinea piece.—What I mean is, that you can show me no passage where there is simply a description of material objects, without any intermixture of moral notions, which produces such an effect." Mr. Murphy mentioned Shakespeare's description of the night before the battle of Agincourt; but it was observed it had *men* in it. Mr. Davies suggested the speech of Juliet, in which she figures herself awaking in the tomb of her ancestors. Someone mentioned the description of Dover Cliff. JOHNSON: "No, Sir; it should be all precipice—all vacuum. The crows impede your fall. The diminished appearance of the boats, and other circumstances, are all very good description; but do not impress the mind at once with the horrible idea of immense height. The impression is divided; you pass on by computation, from one stage of the tremendous space

to another. Had the girl in *The Mourning Bride* said, she could not cast her shoe to the top of one of the pillars in the temple, it would not have aided the idea, but weakened it."

—*The Life*. 1769, Oct. 16th.

Mrs. Montague, a lady distinguished for having written an Essay on Shakespeare, being mentioned—REYNOLDS: "I think that essay does her honour". JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir; it does *her* honour, but it would do nobody else honour. I have, indeed, not read it all. But when I take up the end of a web, and find it packthread, I do not expect, by looking further, to find embroidery. Sir, I will venture to say, there is not one sentence of true criticism in her book." GARRICK: "But, Sir, surely it shows how much Voltaire has mistaken Shakespeare, which nobody else has done". JOHNSON: "Sir, nobody else has thought it worth while. And what merit is there in that? You may as well praise a schoolmaster for whipping a boy who has construed ill. No, Sir, there is no real criticism in it: none showing the beauty of thought, as formed on the workings of the human heart."

The admirers of this Essay may be offended at the slighting manner in which Johnson spoke of it; but let it be remembered, that he gave his honest opinion unbiassed by any prejudice, or any proud jealousy of a woman intruding herself into the chair of criticism; for Sir Joshua Reynolds has told me, that when the Essay first came out, and it was not known who had

written it, Johnson wondered how Sir Joshua could like it. At this time Sir Joshua himself had received no information concerning the author, except being assured by one of our most eminent literati, that it was clear its author did not know the Greek tragedies in the original. One day at Sir Joshua's table, when it was related that Mrs. Montague, in an excess of compliment to the author of a modern tragedy, had exclaimed, "I tremble for Shakespeare," Johnson said, "When Shakespeare has got ——— for his rival, and Mrs. Montague for his defender, he is in a poor state indeed." —*The Life*. 1769, Oct. 16th.

I complained that he had not mentioned Garrick in his Preface to Shakespeare: and asked him if he did not admire him. JOHNSON: "Yes, as 'a poor player, who frets and struts his hour upon the stage'—as a shadow". BOSWELL: "But has he not brought Shakespeare into notice?" JOHNSON: "Sir, to allow that, would be to lampoon the age. Many of Shakespeare's plays are the worse for being acted: Macbeth, for instance." BOSWELL: "What, Sir! is nothing gained by decoration and action! Indeed, I do wish that you had mentioned Garrick." JOHNSON: "My dear Sir, had I mentioned him, I must have mentioned many more: Mrs. Pritchard, Mrs. Cibber,—nay, and Mr. Cibber too: he, too, altered Shakespeare". BOSWELL: "You have read his *Apology*, Sir?" JOHNSON: "Yes, it is very entertaining. But as for Cibber himself, taking from his conversa-

tion all that he ought not to have said, he was a poor creature. I remember when he brought me one of his Odes to have my opinion of it, I could not bear such nonsense, and would not let him read it to the end: so little respect had I for *that great man!*" (laughing). "Yet I remember Richardson wondering that I could treat him with familiarity."

—*The Life*. 1769, Oct. 19th.

BOSWELL: "Foote has a great deal of humour".

JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir". BOSWELL: "He has a singular talent of exhibiting character".

JOHNSON: "Sir, it is not a talent—it is a vice; it is what others abstain from. It is not comedy, which exhibits the character of a species, as that of a miser gathered from many misers: it is farce, which exhibits individuals."

BOSWELL: "Did not he think of exhibiting you, Sir?"

JOHNSON: "Sir, fear restrained him; he knew I would have broken his bones. I would have saved him the trouble of cutting off a leg; I would not have left him a leg to cut off."

BOSWELL: "Pray, Sir, is not Foote an infidel?"

JOHNSON: "I do not know, Sir, that the fellow is an infidel; but if he be an infidel, he is an infidel as a dog is an infidel; that is to say, he has never thought upon the subject."

BOSWELL: "I suppose, Sir, he has thought superficially, and seized the first notions which occurred to his mind".

JOHNSON: "Why then, Sir, still he is like a dog, that snatches the piece next him. Did you never observe that dogs have not the power of comparing? A dog

will take a small bit of meat as readily as a large, when both are before him."

—*The Life*. 1769, Oct. 19th.

I gave him an account of the excellent mimicry of a friend of mine in Scotland; observing, at the same time, that some people thought it a very mean thing. JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, it is making a very mean use of man's powers. But to be a good mimic requires great powers; great acuteness of observation, great retention of what is observed, and great pliancy of organs to represent what is observed. I remember a lady of quality in this town, Lady ———, who was a wonderful mimic, and used to make me laugh immoderately. I have heard she is now gone mad." BOSWELL: "It is amazing how a mimic can not only give you the gestures and voice of a person whom he represents; but even what a person would say on any particular subject". JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, you are to consider that the manner and some particular phrases of a person do much to impress you with an idea of him, and you are not sure that he would say what the mimic says in his character". BOSWELL: "I don't think Foote a good mimic, Sir". JOHNSON: "No, Sir; his imitations are not like. He gives you something different from himself, but not the character which he means to assume. He goes out of himself, without going into other people. He cannot take off any person unless he is strongly marked, such as George Faulkner. He is like a painter who can draw the portrait

of a man who has a wen upon his face, and who therefore is easily known. If a man hops upon one leg, Foote can hop upon one leg. But he has not that nice discrimination which your friend seems to possess. Foote is, however, very entertaining with a kind of conversation between wit and buffoonery."

—*The Life.* 1772, March 21st.

On Wednesday, April 21st, I dined with him at Mr. Thrale's. A gentleman attacked Garrick for being vain. JOHNSON: "No wonder, Sir, that he is vain; a man who is perpetually flattered in every mode that can be conceived. So many bellows have blown the fire, that one wonders he has not by this time become a cinder." BOSWELL: "And such bellows too. Lord Mansfield with his cheeks like to burst, Lord Chatham like an Æolus. I have read such notes from them to him as were enough to turn his head." JOHNSON: "True. When he whom everybody else flatters, flatters me, I then am truly happy." MRS. THRALE: "The sentiment is in Congreve, I think". JOHNSON: "Yes, Madam, in *The Way of the World*:—

'If there's delight in love, 'tis when I see
That heart which others bleed for, bleed for me.'

No, Sir, I should not be surprised though Garrick chained the ocean and lashed the winds." BOSWELL: "Should it not be, Sir, lashed the ocean and chained the winds?" JOHNSON: "No, Sir, recollect the original:

‘In Corum atque Eurum solitus sævire flagellis
Barbarus, Æolio nunquam hoc in carcere passos,
Ipsum compedibus qui vinxerat Ennosigæum.’”

This does very well when both the winds and the sea are personified, and mentioned by their mythological names, as in Juvenal; but when they are mentioned in plain language, the application of the epithets suggested by me is the most obvious; and accordingly, my friend himself, in his imitation of the passage which describes Xerxes, has

“The waves he lashes, and enchains the wind”.

—*The Life*. 1773, April 21st.

Dr. Goldsmith’s new play, *She Stoops to Conquer*, being mentioned—JOHNSON: “I know of no comedy for many years that has so much exhilarated an audience, that has answered so much the great end of comedy—making an audience merry”.

—*The Life*, 1773, April 29th.

In the evening I introduced to Mr. Johnson two good friends of mine, Mr. William Nairne, Advocate, and Mr. Hamilton of Sundrum, my neighbour in the country, both of whom supped with us. I have preserved nothing of what passed, except that Dr. Johnson displayed another of his heterodox opinions,—a contempt of tragic acting. He said: “the action of all players in tragedy is bad. It should be a man’s study to repress those signs of emotion and passion, as they are called.” He was of a

directly contrary opinion to that of Fielding, in his *Tom Jones*, who makes Partridge say, of Garrick, "why, I could act as well as he myself. I am sure, if I had seen a ghost, I should have looked in the very same manner, and done just as he did." For, when I asked him, "Would not you, Sir, start as Mr. Garrick does, if you saw a ghost?" he answered: "I hope not. If I did, I should frighten the ghost."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 15th.

I again mentioned the stage.—JOHNSON: "The appearance of a player, with whom I have drunk tea, counteracts the imagination that he is the character he represents. Nay, you know, nobody imagines that he is the character he represents. They say, 'See Garrick! how he looks to-night! See how he'll clutch the dagger!' That is the buz of the theatre." —*The Tour.* 1773, Aug. 16th.

We talked of the stage. I observed, that we had not now such a company of actors as in the last age; Wilkes, Booth, &c., &c.—JOHNSON: "You think so, because there is one who excels all the rest so much: you compare them with Garrick, and see the deficiency. Garrick's great distinction is his universality. He can represent all modes of life, but that of an easy fine-bred gentleman." PENNINGTON: "He should give over playing young parts".—JOHNSON: "He does not take them now; but he does not leave off those which he has been used to play, because he does them better than

anyone else can do them. If you had generations of actors, if they swarmed like bees, the young ones might drive off the old. Mrs. Cibber, I think, got more reputation than she deserved, as she had a great sameness; though her expression was undoubtedly very fine. Mrs. Clive was the best player I ever saw. Mrs. Pritchard was a very good one; but she had something affected in her manner: I imagine she had some player of the former age in her eye, which occasioned it."

Colonel Pennington said, Garrick sometimes failed in emphasis; as for instance, in *Hamlet*,

"I will speak *daggers* to her; but use *none*",
instead of

"I will *speak* daggers to her; but *use* none".

—*The Tour*. 1773, Aug. 28th.

Having talked of the strictness with which witnesses are examined in courts of justice, Dr. Johnson told us, that Garrick, though accustomed to face multitudes, when produced as a witness in Westminster Hall, was so disconcerted by a new mode of public appearance, that he could not understand what was asked. It was a cause where an actor claimed a *free benefit*; that is to say, a benefit without paying the expense of the house; but the meaning of the term was disputed. Garrick was asked, "Sir, have you a free benefit?" "Yes." "Upon what terms have you it?" "Upon—the terms—of—a free benefit." He was dismissed as

one from whom no information could be obtained. Dr. Johnson is often too hard on our friend Mr. Garrick. When I asked him, why he did not mention him in the Preface to his Shakespeare, he said: "Garrick has been liberally paid for anything he has done for Shakespeare. If I should praise him, I should much more praise the nation who paid him. He has not made Shakespeare better known; he cannot illustrate Shakespeare: so I have reasons enough against mentioning him, were reasons necessary. There should be reasons *for* it." I spoke of Mrs. Montague's very high praises of Garrick. JOHNSON: "Sir, it is fit she should say so much, and I should say nothing. Reynolds is fond of her book, and I wonder at it; for neither I, nor Beauclerk, nor Mrs. Thrale, could get through it."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Sept. 23rd.

Talking of a very penurious gentleman of our acquaintance, he observed, that he exceeded *L'Avare* in the play. I concurred with him, and remarked that he would do well, if introduced in one of Foote's farces; that the best way to get it done, would be to bring Foote to be entertained at his house for a week, and then it would be *facit indignatio*. JOHNSON: "Sir, I wish he had him. I, who have eaten his bread, will not give him to him; but I should be glad he came honestly by him."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Oct. 2nd.

After dinner, various topics were discussed;

but I recollect only one particular. Dr. Johnson compared the different talents of Garrick and Foote, as companions, and gave Garrick greatly the preference for elegance, though he allowed Foote extraordinary powers of entertainment. He said, "Garrick is restrained by some principle; but Foote has the advantage of an unlimited range. Garrick has some delicacy of feeling; it is possible to put him out; you may get the better of him; but Foote is the most incompressible fellow that I ever knew: when you have driven him into a corner, and think you are sure of him, he runs through between your legs, or jumps over your head, and makes his escape."

—*The Tour.* 1773, Nov. 10th.

Many instances of his resolution may be mentioned. In the playhouse at Lichfield, as Mr. Garrick informed me, Johnson having for a moment quitted a chair which was placed for him between the side scenes, a gentleman took possession of it, and when Johnson on his return civilly demanded his seat, rudely refused to give it up: upon which Johnson laid hold of it, and tossed him and the chair into the pit. Foote, who so successfully revived the old comedy, by exhibiting living characters, had resolved to imitate Johnson on the stage; expecting great profits from the ridicule of so celebrated a man. Johnson being informed of his intention, and being at dinner at Mr. Thomas Davies's, the bookseller, from whom I had the story, he asked Mr. Davies "what

was the common price of an oak stick;" and being answered sixpence, "Why then, Sir," said he, "give me leave to send your servant to purchase me a shilling one. I'll have a double quantity; for I am told Foote means to *take me off*, as he calls it, and I am determined the fellow shall not do it with impunity." Davies took care to acquaint Foote of this, which effectually checked the wantonness of the mimic.

—*The Life*. 1775, Feb.

From Swift, there was an easy transition to Mr. Thomas Sheridan. JOHNSON: "Sheridan is a wonderful admirer of the tragedy of *Douglas*, and presented its author with a gold medal. Some years ago, at a coffee-house in Oxford, I called to him, 'Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Sheridan, how came you to give a gold medal to Home, for writing that foolish play?' This, you see, was wanton and insolent; but I *meant* to be wanton and insolent. A medal has no value but as a stamp of merit. And was Sheridan to assume to himself the right of giving that stamp? If Sheridan was magnificent enough to bestow a gold medal as an honorary reward of dramatic excellence, he should have requested one of the Universities to choose the person on whom it should be conferred. Sheridan had no right to give a stamp of merit: it was counterfeiting Apollo's coin."

—*The Life*. 1775, March 24th.

On Monday, March 27th, I breakfasted with

him at Mr. Strahan's. He told us, that he was engaged to go that evening to Mrs. Abington's benefit. "She was visiting some ladies whom I was visiting, and begged that I would come to her benefit. I told her I could not hear: but she insisted so much on my coming, that it would have been brutal to have refused her." This was a speech quite characteristical. He loved to bring forward his having been in the gay circles of life; and he was, perhaps, a little vain of the solicitations of this elegant and fashionable actress. He told us, the play was to be *The Hypocrite*, altered from Cibber's *Nonjuror*, so as to satirize the Methodists. "I do not think," said he, "the character of the Hypocrite justly applicable to the Methodists, but it was very applicable to the Nonjurors."

—*The Life*. 1775, March 27th.

I met him at Drury Lane playhouse in the evening. Sir Joshua Reynolds, at Mrs. Abington's request, had promised to bring a body of wits to her benefit; and having secured forty places in the front boxes, had done me the honour to put me in the group. Johnson sat on the seat directly behind me; and as he could neither see nor hear at such a distance from the stage, he was wrapped up in grave abstraction, and seemed quite a cloud amidst all the sunshine of glitter and gaiety. I wondered at his patience in sitting out a play of five acts, and a farce of two. He said very little; but after the prologue to *Bon Ton* had been spoken, which he could hear pretty

well from the more slow and distinct utterance, he talked on prologue writing, and observed, "Dryden has written prologues superior to any that David Garrick has written; but David Garrick has written more good prologues than Dryden has done. It is wonderful that he has been able to write such variety of them."

At Mr. Beauclerk's, where I supped, was Mr. Garrick, whom I made happy with Johnson's praise of his prologues; and I suppose, in gratitude to him, he took up one of his favourite topics—the nationality of the Scotch—which he maintained in a pleasant manner, with the aid of a little poetical fiction. "Come, come, don't deny it: they are really national. Why, now, the Adams are as liberal-minded men as any in the world: but I don't know how it is, all their workmen are Scotch. You are, to be sure, wonderfully free from that nationality; but so it happens, that you employ the only Scotch shoeblack in London." He imitated the manner of his old master with ludicrous exaggeration; repeating, with pauses and half-whistlings interjected,

*"Os homini sublime dedit,—cælumque tueri
Jussit,—et erectos ad sidera—tollere vultus":*

looking downwards all the time, and, while pronouncing the four last words, absolutely touching the ground with a kind of contorted gesticulation.

Garrick, however, when he pleased, could imitate Johnson very exactly; for that great actor, with his distinguished powers of expres-

sion which were so universally admired, possessed also an admirable talent of mimicry. He was always jealous that Johnson spoke lightly of him. I recollect his exhibiting him to me one day, as if saying, "Davy has some convivial pleasantry about him, but 'tis a futile fellow;" which he uttered perfectly with the tone and air of Johnson.

I cannot too frequently request of my readers, while they peruse on my account of Johnson's conversation, to endeavour to keep in mind his deliberate and strong utterance. His mode of speaking was indeed very impressive; and I wished it could be preserved as music is written, according to the very ingenious method of Mr. Steele, who has shown how the recitation of Mr. Garrick, and other eminent speakers, might be transmitted to posterity *in score*.

—*The Life*. 1775, March 27th.

Dr. Johnson, as usual, spoke contemptuously of Colley Cibber. "It is wonderful that a man, who for forty years had lived with the great and the witty, should have acquired so ill the talents of conversation; and he had but half to furnish; for one half of what he said was oaths." He, however, allowed considerable merit to some of his comedies, and said there was no reason to believe that *The Careless Husband* was not written by himself. Davies said, he was the first dramatic writer who introduced genteel ladies upon the stage. Johnson refuted his observation by instancing several such characters in comedies before his time. DAVIES

(trying to defend himself from a charge of ignorance): "I mean genteel moral characters". "I think," said Hickey, "gentility and morality are inseparable." BOSWELL: "By no means, Sir. The genteelest characters are often the most immoral. Does not Lord Chesterfield give precepts for uniting wickedness and the graces? A man, indeed, is not genteel when he gets drunk; but most vices may be committed very genteelly: a man may debauch his friend's wife genteelly: he may cheat at cards genteelly." HICKEY: "I do not think *that* is genteel". BOSWELL: "Sir, it may not be like a gentleman, but it may be genteel".

—*The Life*. 1775, April 6th.

Mrs. Pritchard being mentioned, he [Johnson] said, "Her playing was quite mechanical. It is wonderful how little mind she had. Sir, she had never read the tragedy of *Macbeth* all through. She no more thought of the play out of which her part was taken, than a shoemaker thinks of the skin, out of which the piece of leather, of which he is making a pair of shoes, is cut."

On Saturday, May 8th, I dined with him at Mr. Thrall's, where we met the Irish Dr. Campbell. Johnson had supped the night before at Mrs. Abington's with some fashionable people whom he named; and he seemed much pleased with having made one in so elegant a circle. Nor did he omit to pique his *mistress* a little with jealousy of her housewifery; for he said, with a smile, "Mrs.

Abington's jelly, my dear lady, was better than yours."

Mrs. Thrale, who frequently practised a coarse mode of flattery, by repeating his *bon-mots* in his hearing, told us that he had said a certain celebrated actor was just fit to stand at the door of an auction-room with a long pole, and cry, "Pray, gentlemen, walk in;" and that a certain author, upon hearing this, had said that another still more celebrated actor was fit for nothing better than that, and would pick your pocket after you came out. JOHNSON: "Nay, my dear lady, there is no wit in what our friend added; there is only abuse. You may as well say of any man that he will pick a pocket. Besides, the man who is stationed at the door does not pick people's pockets; that is done within, by the auctioneer."

Mrs. Thrale told us, that Tom Davies repeated, in a very bold manner, the story of Dr. Johnson's first repartee to me, which I have related exactly. He made me say, "I *was born* in Scotland", instead of "I *come from* Scotland"; so that Johnson's saying, "That, Sir, is what a great many of your countrymen cannot help," had no point, or even meaning: and that upon this being mentioned to Mr. Fitzherbert, he observed, "it is not every man that can *carry a bon-mot*." —*The Life*. 1775, April 7th.

The Beggar's Opera and the common question, whether it was pernicious in its effects, having been introduced;—JOHNSON: "As to

this matter, which has been very much contested, I myself am of opinion, that more influence has been ascribed to *The Beggar's Opera*, than it in reality ever had; for I do not believe that any man was ever made a rogue by being present at its representation. At the same time I do not deny that it may have some influence, by making the character of a rogue familiar, and in some degree pleasing." Then collecting himself, as it were, to give a heavy stroke: "There is in it such a *labefaction* of all principles as may be injurious to morality."

While he pronounced this response, we sat in a comical sort of restraint, smothering a laugh, which we were afraid might burst out. In his life of Gay, he has been still more decisive as to the inefficiency of *The Beggar's Opera* in corrupting society. But I have ever thought somewhat differently; for, indeed, not only are the gaiety and heroism of a highwayman very captivating to a youthful imagination, but the arguments for adventurous depredation are so plausible, the allusions so lively, and the contrasts with the ordinary and more painful modes of acquiring property are so artfully displayed, that it requires a cool and strong judgment to resist so imposing an aggregate: yet, I own, I should be very sorry to have *The Beggar's Opera* suppressed; for there is in it so much of real London life, so much brilliant wit, and such a variety of airs, which, from early association of ideas, engage, soothe, and enliven the mind, that no perform-

ance which the theatre exhibits delights me more.

The late “*worthy*” Duke of Queensbury, as Thomson, in his *Seasons*, justly characterizes him, told me that when Gay showed him *The Beggar’s Opera*, his Grace’s observation was, “This is a very odd thing, Gay; I am satisfied that it is either a very good thing, or a very bad thing.” It proved the former, beyond the warmest expectations of the author or his friends. Mr. Cambridge, however, showed us to-day, that there was good reason enough to doubt concerning its success. He was told by Quin, that during the first night of its appearance it was long in a very dubious state; that there was a disposition to damn it, and that it was saved by the song,

“Oh, ponder well! be not severe!”

the audience being much affected by the innocent looks of Polly, when she came to those two lines, which exhibit at once a painful and ridiculous image,

“For on the rope that hangs my dear,
Depends poor Polly’s life.”

Quin himself had so bad an opinion of it, that he refused the part of Captain Macheath, and gave it to Walker, who acquired great celebrity by his grave yet animated performance of it.

—*The Life*. 1775, April 11th.

Before setting out for Scotland on the 23rd, I was frequently in his company at different

places, but during this period have recorded only two remarks; one concerning Garrick: "He has not Latin enough. He finds out the Latin by the meaning, rather than the meaning by the Latin:" and another concerning writers of travels, who, he observed, "were more defective than any other writers."

—*The Life*. 1775, May.

It happened that Foote was at Paris at the same time with Dr. Johnson, and his description of my friend while there was abundantly ludicrous. He told me, that the French were quite astonished at his figure and manner, and at his dress, which he obstinately continued exactly as in London;—his brown clothes, black stockings, and plain shirt. He mentioned, that an Irish gentleman said to Johnson, "Sir, you have not seen the best French players." JOHNSON: "Players, Sir! I look on them as no better than creatures set upon tables and joint-stools to make faces and produce laughter, like dancing dogs."—"But, sir, you will allow that some players are better than others?" JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, as some dogs dance better than others".

—*The Life*. 1775, Autumn.

Dr. Burney having remarked that Mr. Garrick was beginning to look old, he [*i.e.* Johnson] said, "Why, Sir, you are not to wonder at that; no man's face has had more wear and tear."

—*The Life*. 1775.

I observed that Garrick, who was about to quit the stage, would soon have an easier life. JOHNSON: "I doubt that, Sir". BOSWELL: "Why, Sir, he will be Atlas with the burden off his back". JOHNSON: "But I know not if he will be so steady without his load. However, he should never play any more, but be entirely the gentleman, and not partly the player; he should no longer subject himself to be hissed by a mob, or to be insolently treated by performers, whom he used to rule with a high hand, and who would gladly retaliate." BOSWELL: "I think he should play once a year for the benefit of decayed actors, as it has been said he means to do". JOHNSON: "Alas, Sir, he will soon be a decayed actor himself".

—*The Life*. 1776, March 19th.

We then visited Mr. Peter Garrick, who had that morning received a letter from his brother David, announcing our coming to Lichfield. He was engaged to dinner, but asked us to tea, and to sleep at his house. Johnson, however, would not quit his old acquaintance Wilkins, of the "Three Crowns". The family likeness of the Garricks was very striking; and Johnson thought that David's vivacity was not so peculiar to himself as was supposed. "Sir," said he, "I don't know but if Peter had cultivated all the arts of gaiety as much as David has done, he might have been as brisk and lively. Depend upon it, Sir, vivacity is much an art, and depends greatly on habit." I believe there is a good deal of truth in this, notwithstanding

a ludicrous story told me by a lady abroad, of a heavy German baron, who had lived much with the young English at Geneva, and was ambitious to be as lively as they; with which view, he, with assiduous attention, was jumping over the chairs and tables in his lodgings; and when the people of the house ran in and asked with surprise, what was the matter, he answered, "*Sh' apprens t'être fif.*"

—*The Life.* 1776, March 23rd.

There was at this time a company of players performing at Lichfield. The manager, Mr. Stanton, sent his compliments, and begged leave to wait on Dr. Johnson. Johnson received him very courteously, and he drank a glass of wine with us. He was a plain, decent, well-behaved man, and expressed his gratitude to Dr. Johnson for having once got him permission from Dr. Taylor at Ashbourne to play there upon moderate terms. Garrick's name was soon introduced. JOHNSON: "Garrick's conversation is gay and grotesque. It is a dish of all sorts, but all good things. There is no solid meat in it; there is a want of sentiment in it. Not but that he has sentiment sometimes, and sentiment, too, very powerful and very pleasing; but it has not its full proportion in his conversation."

When we were by ourselves he told me, "Forty years ago, Sir, I was in love with an actress here, Mrs. Emmet, who acted Flora in *Hob in the Well.*" What merit this lady had as an actress, or what was her figure or

her manner, I have not been informed: but, if we may believe Mr. Garrick, his old master's taste in theatrical merit was by no means refined; he was not an *elegans formarum spectator*. Garrick used to tell that Johnson said of an actor, who played Sir Harry Wildair, at Lichfield, "There is a courtly vivacity about the fellow;" when, in fact, according to Garrick's account, "he was the most vulgar ruffian that ever went upon *boards*."

We had promised Mr. Stanton to be at his theatre on Monday. Dr. Johnson jocularly proposed to me to write a Prologue for the occasion: "A Prologue, by James Boswell, Esq., from the Hebrides." I was really inclined to take the hint. Methought, "Prologue, spoken before Dr. Samuel Johnson at Lichfield, 1776," would have sounded as well as "Prologue, spoken before the Duke of York at Oxford," in Charles the Second's time. Much might have been said of what Lichfield had done for Shakespeare, by producing Johnson and Garrick. But I found he was averse to it.

—*The Life*. 1776, March 23rd.

On Thursday, April 11th, I dined with him at General Paoli's, in whose house I now resided, and where I had ever afterwards the honour of being entertained with the kindest attention as his constant guest, while I was in London, till I had a house of my own there. I mentioned my having that morning introduced to Mr. Garrick, Count Neni, a Flemish nobleman of great rank and fortune, to whom

Garrick talked of Abel Drugger as a *small part*; and related, with pleasant vanity, that a Frenchman who had seen him in one of his low characters, exclaimed, "*Comment! je ne le crois pas. Ce n'est pas Monsieur Garrick, ce grand homme!*" Garrick added, with an appearance of grave recollection, "If I were to begin life again, I think I should not play these low characters." Upon which I observed, "Sir, you would be in the wrong; for your great excellence is your variety of playing, your representing so well characters so very different." JOHNSON: "Garrick, Sir, was not in earnest in what he said; for, to be sure, his peculiar excellence is his variety; and, perhaps, there is not any one character which has not been as well acted by somebody else, as he could do it." BOSWELL: "Why, then, Sir, did he talk so?" JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, to make you answer as you did". BOSWELL: "I don't know, Sir; he seemed to dip deep into his mind for the reflection". JOHNSON: "He had not far to dip, Sir; he had said the same thing, probably, twenty times before". —*The Life*. 1776, April 11th.

"Garrick," he observed, "does not play the part of Archer in *The Beaux' Stratagem* well. The gentleman should break out through the footman, which is not the case as he does it."

—*The Life*. 1776, May.

Foote being mentioned, Johnson said, "He is not a good mimic." One of the company

added, "A merry Andrew, a buffoon!" JOHNSON: "But he has wit, too, and is not deficient in ideas, or in fertility and variety of imagery, and not empty of reading; he has knowledge enough to fill up his part. One species of wit he has in an eminent degree, that of escape. You drive him into a corner with both hands; but he's gone, Sir, when you think you have got him—like an animal that jumps over your head. Then he has a great range for wit; he never lets truth stand between him and a jest, and he is sometimes mighty coarse. Garrick is under many restraints from which Foote is free." WILKES: "Garrick's wit is more like Lord Chesterfield's". JOHNSON: "The first time I was in company with Foote was at Fitzherbert's. Having no good opinion of the fellow, I was resolved not to be pleased: and it is very difficult to please a man against his will. I went on eating my dinner pretty sullenly, affecting not to mind him; but the dog was so very comical, that I was obliged to lay down my knife and fork, throw myself back upon my chair, and fairly laugh it out. No, Sir, he was irresistible. He upon one occasion experienced, in an extraordinary degree, the efficacy of his powers of entertaining. Amongst the many and various modes which he tried of getting money, he became a partner with a small-beer brewer, and he was to have a share of the profits for procuring customers amongst his numerous acquaintance. Fitzherbert was one who took his small-beer; but it was so bad that the servants resolved not

to drink it. They were at some loss how to notify their resolution, being afraid of offending their master, who they knew liked Foote much as a companion. At last they fixed upon a little black boy, who was rather a favourite, to be their deputy, and deliver their remonstrance; and having invested him with the whole authority of the kitchen, he was to inform Mr. Fitzherbert, in all their names, upon a certain day, that they would drink Foote's small-beer no longer. On that day Foote happened to dine at Fitzherbert's, and this boy served at table; he was so delighted with Foote's stories, and merriment, and grimace, that when he went downstairs he told them, 'This is the finest man I have ever seen. I will not deliver your message. I will drink his small-beer.'

Somebody observed, that Garrick could not have done this. WILKES: "Garrick would have made the small-beer still smaller. He is now leaving the stage; but he will play *Scrub* all his life." I knew that Johnson would let nobody attack Garrick but himself, as Garrick said to me, and I had heard him praise his liberality; so, to bring out his commendation of his celebrated pupil, I said, loudly, "I have heard Garrick is liberal." JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, I know that Garrick has given away more money than any man in England that I am acquainted with, and that not from ostentatious views. Garrick was very poor when he began life; so when he came to have money, he probably was very unskilful in giving away, and saved when he should not. But Garrick began to be liberal

as soon as he could ; and I am of opinion, the reputation of avarice, which he has had, has been very lucky for him, and prevented his having many enemies. You despise a man for avarice, but do not hate him. Garrick might have been much better attacked for living with more splendour than is suitable to a player: if they had had the wit to have assaulted him in that quarter, they might have galled him more. But they have kept clamouring about his avarice, which has rescued him from much obloquy and envy."

Talking of the great difficulty of obtaining authentic information for biography, Johnson told us, "When I was a young fellow I wanted to write the 'Life of Dryden,' and in order to get materials, I applied to the only two persons then alive who had seen him; these were old Swinney, and old Cibber. Swinney's information was no more than this, 'That at Will's coffee-house Dryden had a particular chair for himself, which was set by the fire in winter, and was then called his winter-chair; and it was carried out for him to the balcony in summer, and was then called his summer-chair.' Cibber could tell no more but 'That he remembered him a decent old man, arbiter of critical disputes at Will's.' You are to consider that Cibber was then at a great distance from Dryden, had, perhaps, one leg only in the room, and durst not draw in the other." BOSWELL: "But Cibber was a man of observation?" JOHNSON: "I think not". BOSWELL: "You will allow his *Apology* to be well done". JOHNSON: "Very well done, to be sure,

Sir. That book is a striking proof of the justice of Pope's remark:

‘Each might his several province well command,
Would all but stoop to what they understand.’”

BOSWELL: “And his plays are good”. JOHNSON: “Yes; but that was his trade; *l'esprit du corps*; he had been all his life among players and play-writers. I wondered that he had so little to say in conversation, for he had kept the best company, and learnt all that can be got by the ear. He abused Pindar to me, and then showed me an ode of his own, with an absurd couplet making a linnet soar on an eagle's wing. I told him, that when the ancients made a simile, they always made it like something real.”

—*The Life*. 1776, May 15th.

In the summer he wrote a Prologue, which was spoken before *A Word to the Wise*, a comedy by Mr. Hugh Kelly, which had been brought upon the stage in 1770; but he being a writer for the Ministry in one of the newspapers, it fell a sacrifice to popular fury, and, in the play-house phrase, was *damned*. By the generosity of Mr. Harris, the proprietor of Covent Garden Theatre, it was now exhibited for one night, for the benefit of the author's widow and children. To conciliate the favour of the audience, was the intention of Johnson's Prologue, which, as it is not long, I shall here insert, as a proof that his poetical talents were in no degree impaired.

" This night presents a play, which public rage,
 Or right or wrong, once hooted from the stage:
 From zeal or malice, now no more we dread,
 For English vengeance *avars not with the dead*.
 A generous foe regards with pitying eye
 The man whom Fate has laid where all must lie.
 To wit, reviving from its author's dust,
 Be kind, ye judges, or at least be just:
 Let no renewed hostilities invade
 Th' oblivious grave's inviolable shade.
 Let one great payment every claim appease,
 And him who cannot hurt, allow to please;
 To please by scenes, unconscious of offence,
 By harmless merriment, or useful sense.
 Where aught of bright or fair the piece displays,
 Approve it only;—'t is too late to praise.
 If want of skill or want of care appear,
 Forbear to hiss;—the poet cannot hear.
 By all, like him, must praise and blame be found,
 At last, a fleeting gleam, or empty sound;
 Yet then shall calm reflection bless the night,
 When liberal pity dignified delight;
 When pleasure fired her torch at virtue's flame,
 And mirth was bounty with an humbler name."

—*The Life*. 1777, Summer.

A circumstance which could not fail to be very
 pleasing to Johnson occurred this year. The
 tragedy of *Sir Thomas Overbury*, written by his
 early companion in London, Richard Savage,
 was brought up with alterations, at Drury Lane
 Theatre. The Prologue to it was written by
 Mr. Richard Brinsley Sheridan; in which, after
 describing very pathetically the wretchedness
 of

“Ill-fated Savage, at whose birth was given
No parent but the Muse, no friend but Heav’n :”

he introduced an elegant compliment to Johnson on his *Dictionary*, that wonderful performance which cannot be too often or too highly praised; of which Mr. Harris, in his *Philological Inquiries*, justly and liberally observes, “Such is its merit, that our language does not possess a more copious, learned, and valuable work”. The concluding lines of this prologue were these:—

“So pleads the tale that gives to future times
The son’s misfortunes and the parent’s crimes;
There shall his fame (if own’d to-night) survive,
Fix’d by THE HAND THAT BIDS OUR LANGUAGE
LIVE”.

Mr. Sheridan here at once did honour to his taste and to his liberality of sentiment, by showing that he was not prejudiced from the unlucky difference which had taken place between his worthy father and Dr. Johnson. I have already mentioned, that Johnson was very desirous of reconciliation with old Mr. Sheridan. It will, therefore, not seem at all surprising that he was zealous in acknowledging the brilliant merit of his son. While it had as yet been displayed only in the drama, Johnson proposed him as a member of THE LITERARY CLUB, observing, that “he who has written the two best comedies of his age is surely a considerable man.” And he had, accordingly, the honour to be elected; for an honour it undoubtedly must be allowed to be, when it is considered of

whom that society consists, and that a single black-ball excludes a candidate.

—*The Life.* 1777.

“Colley Cibber once consulted me as to one of his birthday Odes, a long time before it was wanted. I objected very freely to several passages. Cibber lost patience, and would not read his ode to an end. When we had done with criticism, we walked over to Richardson’s, the author of *Clarissa*, and I wondered to find Richardson displeased that I ‘did not treat Cibber with more *respect*.’ Now, Sir, to talk of *respect* for a *player*!” (smiling disdainfully). BOSWELL: “There, Sir, you are always heretical; you never will allow merit to a player”. JOHNSON: “Merit, Sir; what merit? Do you respect a rope-dancer, or a ballad-singer?” BOSWELL: “No, Sir; but we respect a great player, as a man who can conceive lofty sentiments, and can express them gracefully”. JOHNSON: “What, Sir, a fellow who claps a hump on his back, and a lump on his leg, and cries, ‘*I am Richard the Third*’? Nay, Sir, a ballad-singer is a higher man, for he does two things; he repeats and he sings. There is both recitation and music in his performance; the player only recites.” BOSWELL: “My dear Sir! you may turn anything into ridicule. I allow, that a player of farce is not entitled to respect; he does a little thing; but he who can represent exalted characters, and touch the noblest passions, has very respectable powers; and mankind have agreed

in admiring great talents for the stage. We must consider, too, that a great player does what very few people are capable to do: his art is a very rare faculty. *Who* can repeat Hamlet's soliloquy, 'To be, or not to be,' as Garrick does it?" JOHNSON: "Anybody may. Jemmy there" (a boy about eight years old, who was in the room) "will do it as well in a week." BOSWELL: "No, no, Sir; and as a proof of the merit of great acting, and of the value which mankind set upon it, Garrick has got £100,000". JOHNSON: "Is getting £100,000 a proof of excellence? That has been done by a scoundrel commissary."

This was most fallacious reasoning. I was *sure*, for once, that I had the best side of the argument. I boldly maintained the just distinction between a tragedian and a mere theatrical droll; between those who rouse our terror and pity, and those who only make us laugh. "If," said I, "Betterton and Foote were to walk into this room, you would respect Betterton much more than Foote." JOHNSON: "If Betterton were to walk into this room with Foote, Foote would soon drive him out of it. Foote, Sir, *quatenus* Foote, has powers superior to them all."

—*The Life*. 1777, Sept. 21st.

We retired from Mrs. Williams to another room. Tom Davies soon after joined us. He had now unfortunately failed in his circumstances, and was much indebted to Dr. Johnson's kindness in obtaining for him many alleviations of his distress. After he went away, Johnson

blamed his folly in quitting the stage, by which he and his wife got £500 a year. I said, I believed it was owing to Churchill's attack upon him,

“He mouths a sentence, as curs mouth a bone.”

JOHNSON: “I believe so too, Sir. But what a man is he, who is to be driven from the stage by a line? Another line would have driven him from his shop.” —*The Life*. 1778, March 20th.

Our poor friend, Mr. Thomas Davies, was soon to have a benefit at Drury Lane Theatre, as some relief to his unfortunate circumstances. We were all warmly interested for his success, and had contributed to it. However, we thought there was no harm in having our joke, when he could not be hurt by it. I proposed that he should be brought on to speak a Prologue upon the occasion; and I began to mutter fragments of what it might be; as, that when now grown *old*, he was obliged to cry, “Poor Tom's *a-cold*”; —that he owned he had been driven from the stage by a Churchill, but that was no disgrace, for a Churchill had beat the French; —that he had been satirized as “mouthing a sentence as curs mouth a bone”, but he was now glad of a bone to pick. “Nay,” said Johnson, “I would have him to say,

‘Mad Tom is come to see the world again’.”

—*The Life*. 1778, April 7th.

BOSWELL: "It is easy for you, Mr. Garrick, to talk to an author as you talked to Elphinston; you, who have been so long the manager of a theatre, rejecting the plays of poor authors. You are an old judge, who have often pronounced sentence of death. You are a practised surgeon, who have often amputated limbs: and though this may have been for the good of your patients, they cannot like you. Those who have undergone a dreadful operation are not very fond of seeing the operator again."

GARRICK: "Yes, I know enough of that. There was a reverend gentleman (Mr. Hawkins), who wrote a tragedy, the SIEGE of something, which I refused."

HARRIS: "So the siege was raised". JOHNSON: "Ay, he came to me and complained; and told me that Garrick said his play was wrong in the *concoction*. Now, what is the concoction of a play?" (Here Garrick started, and twisted himself, and seemed sorely vexed; for Johnson told me he believed the story was true.)

GARRICK: "I—I—I—said, *first* concoction".

JOHNSON (smiling): "Well, he left out *first*. And Rich, he said, refused him *in false English*: he could show it under his hand."

GARRICK: "He wrote to me in violent wrath, for having refused his play: 'Sir, this is growing a very serious and terrible affair. I am resolved to publish my play. I will appeal to the world; and how will your judgment appear!' I answered, 'Sir, notwithstanding all the seriousness, and all the terrors, I have no objection to your publishing your play; and as you live at a great

distance (Devonshire, I believe), if you will send it to me, I will convey it to the press.' I never heard more of it,—ha! ha! ha!"

—*The Life*. 1778, April 9th.

Talking of fame, for which there is so great a desire, I observed how little there is of it in reality, compared with the other objects of human attention. "Let every man recollect, and he will be sensible how small a part of his time is employed in talking or thinking of Shakespeare, Voltaire, or any of the most celebrated men that have ever lived, or are now supposed to occupy the attention and admiration of the world. Let this be extracted and compressed; into what a narrow space will it go!" I then slyly introduced Mr. Garrick's fame, and his assuming the airs of a great man. JOHNSON: "Sir, it is wonderful how *little* Garrick assumes. No, Sir, Garrick *fortunam reverenter habet*. Consider, Sir,—celebrated men, such as you have mentioned, have had their applause at a distance; but Garrick had it dashed in his face, sounded in his ears, and went home every night with the plaudits of a thousand in his *cranium*. Then, Sir, Garrick did not *find*, but *made* his way to the tables, the *levées*, and almost the bedchambers of the great. Then, Sir, Garrick had under him a numerous body of people; who, from fear of his power and hopes of his favour, and admiration of his talents, were constantly submissive to him. And here is a man who has advanced the dignity of his profession. Garrick has made a

player a higher character." SCOTT: "And he is a very sprightly writer too". JOHNSON: "Yes, Sir, and all this supported by great wealth of his own acquisition. If all this had happened to me, I should have had a couple of fellows with long poles walking before me, to knock down everybody that stood in the way. Consider, if all this had happened to Cibber or Quin, they'd have jumped over the moon. Yet Garrick speaks to *us*" (smiling). BOSWELL: "And Garrick is a very good man, a charitable man". JOHNSON: "Sir, a liberal man. He has given away more money than any man in England. There may be a little vanity mixed; but he has shown that money is not his first object". BOSWELL: "Yet Foote used to say of him, that he walked out with an intention to do a generous action; but turning the corner of a street, he met with the ghost of a halfpenny, which frightened him". JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, that is very true, too; for I never knew a man of whom it could be said with less certainty to-day, what he will do to-morrow, than Garrick; it depends so much on his humour at the time". SCOTT: "I am glad to hear of his liberality. He has been represented as very saving." JOHNSON: "With his domestic saving we have nothing to do. I remember drinking tea with him long ago, when Peg Woffington made it, and he grumbled at her for making it too strong. He had then begun to feel money in his purse, and did not know when he should have enough of it."

—*The Life*. 1778, April 10th.

Talking of Miss [———], a literary lady, he said, "I was obliged to speak to Miss Reynolds, to let her know that I desired she would not flatter me so much." Somebody now observed, "She flatters Garrick." JOHNSON: "She is in the right to flatter Garrick. She is in the right for two reasons; first, because she has the world with her, who have been praising Garrick these thirty years; and, secondly, because she is rewarded for it by Garrick. Why should she flatter *me*? I can do nothing for her. Let her carry her praise to a better market. (Then turning to Mrs. Knowles): You, Madam, have been flattering me all the evening; I wish you would give Boswell a little now. If you knew his merit as well as I do, you would say a great deal; he is the best travelling-companion in the world." —*The Life*. 1778, April 15th.

Goldsmith, in his diverting simplicity, complained one day, in a mixed company, of Lord Camden. "I met him," said he, "at Lord Clare's house in the country, and he took no more notice of me than if I had been an ordinary man." The company having laughed heartily, Johnson stood forth in defence of his friend. "Nay, gentlemen," said he, "Dr. Goldsmith is in the right. A nobleman ought to have made up to such a man as Goldsmith; and I think it is much against Lord Camden that he neglected him."

Nor could he patiently endure to hear, that such respect as he thought due only to higher

intellectual qualities should be bestowed on men of slighter, though perhaps more amusing, talents. I told him, that one morning, when I went to breakfast with Garrick, who was very vain of his intimacy with Lord Camden, he accosted me thus:—"Pray now, did you—did you meet a little lawyer turning the corner, eh?"—"No, Sir," said I. "Pray what do you mean by the question?"—"Why," replied Garrick, with an affected indifference, yet as if standing on tip-toe, "Lord Camden has this moment left me. We have had a long walk together." JOHNSON: "Well, Sir, Garrick talked very properly. Lord Camden *was a little lawyer* to be associated so familiarly with a player."

Sir Joshua Reynolds observed, with great truth, that Johnson considered Garrick to be as it were his *property*. He would allow no man either to blame or to praise Garrick in his presence without contradicting him.

—*The Life.* 1778.

On Saturday, April 24th, I dined with him at Mr. Beauclerk's, with Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mr. Jones (afterwards Sir William), Mr. Langton, Mr. Steevens, Mr. Paradise, and Dr. Higgins. I mentioned that Mr. Wilkes had attacked Garrick to me, as a man who had no friend. JOHNSON: "I believe he is right, Sir. Οἱ φίλοι, οὐ φίλος—He had friends but no friend. Garrick was so diffused, he had no man to whom he wished to unbosom himself. He found people always ready to applaud him, and that always for the same thing; so he saw

life with great uniformity." I took upon me, for once, to fight with Goliath's weapons, and play the sophist.—"Garrick did not need a friend, as he got from everybody all that he wanted. What is a friend? One who supports and comforts you, while others do not. Friendship, you know, Sir, is the cordial drop, 'to make the nauseous draught of life go down'; but if the draught be not nauseous, if it be all sweet, there is no occasion for that drop."

JOHNSON: "Many men would not be content to live so. I hope I should not. They would wish to have an intimate friend, with whom they might compare minds and cherish private virtues." One of the company mentioned Lord Chesterfield as a man who had no friend.

JOHNSON: "There were more materials to make friendship in Garrick, had he not been so diffused". BOSWELL: "Garrick was pure gold, but beat out to thin leaf. Lord Chesterfield was tinsel." JOHNSON: "Garrick was a very good man, the most cheerful man of his age; a decent liver in a profession which is supposed to give indulgence to licentiousness; and a man who gave away, freely, money acquired by himself. He begun the world with a great hunger for money; the son of a half-pay officer, bred in a family whose study was to make fourpence do as much as others made fourpence halfpenny do. But when he had got money he was very liberal." I presumed to animadvert on his eulogy on Garrick, in his *Lives of the Poets*. "You say, Sir, his death eclipsed the gaiety of nations." JOHNSON: "I could not have said

more or less. It is the truth: *eclipsed*, not *extinguished*; and his death *did* eclipse; it was like a storm." BOSWELL: "But why nations? Did his gaiety extend farther than his own nation?" JOHNSON: "Why, Sir, some exaggeration must be allowed. Besides, nations may be said—if we allow the Scotch to be a nation, to have gaiety,—which they have not. *You* are an exception, though. Come, gentlemen, let us candidly admit that there is one Scotchman who is cheerful." BEAUCLERK: "But he is a very unnatural Scotchman". I, however, continued to think the compliment to Garrick hyperbolically untrue. His acting had ceased some time before his death; at any rate he had acted in Ireland but a short time, at an early period of his life, and never in Scotland. I objected also to what appears an anti-climax of praise, when contrasted with the preceding panegyric, "and diminished the public stock of harmless pleasure!" "Is not *harmless pleasure* very tame?" JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir, harmless pleasure is the highest praise. Pleasure is a word of dubious import; pleasure is, in general, dangerous, and pernicious to virtue; to be able, therefore, to furnish pleasure that is harmless, pleasure pure and unalloyed, is as great a power as man can possess." This was, perhaps, as ingenious a defence as could be made; still, however, I was not satisfied.

—*The Life*. 1779, April 24th.

John Gilbert Cooper related, that soon after the publication of his *Dictionary*, Garrick

being asked by Johnson what people said of it, told him, that among other animadversions, it was objected that he cited authorities which were beneath the dignity of such a work, and mentioned Richardson. "Nay," said Johnson, "I have done worse than that: I have cited *thee*, David."

—*The Life*. 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's *Johnsoniana*.

When in good humour, he would talk of his own writings with a wonderful frankness and candour, and would even criticise them with the closest severity. One day, having read over one of his "Rambles", Mr. Langton asked him how he liked that paper; he shook his head, and answered, "Too wordy." At another time, when one was reading his tragedy of *Irene*, to a company at a house in the country, he left the room; and somebody having asked him the reason of this, he replied, "Sir, I thought it had been better."

—*The Life*. 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's *Johnsoniana*.

Talking of the farce of *High Life below Stairs*, he said, "Here is a farce which is really very diverting, when you see it acted; and yet one may read it, and not know that one has been reading anything at all."

He used at one time to go occasionally to the green-room of Drury Lane Theatre, where he was much regarded by the players, and was very easy and facetious with them. He had a

very high opinion of Mrs. Clive's comic powers, and conversed more with her than with any of them. He said, "Clive, Sir, is a good thing to sit by; she always understands what you say." And she said of him, "I love to sit by Dr. Johnson; he always entertains me." One night, when *The Recruiting Officer* was acted, he said to Mr. Holland, who had been expressing an apprehension that Dr. Johnson would disdain the works of Farquhar: "No, Sir, I think Farquhar a man whose writings have considerable merit."

His friend Garrick was so busy in conducting the drama, that they could not have so much intercourse as Mr. Garrick used to profess an anxious wish that there should be. There might, indeed, be something in the contemptuous severity as to the merit of acting, which his old preceptor nourished in himself, that would mortify Garrick after the great applause which he received from the audience. For though Johnson said of him, "Sir, a man who has a nation to admire him every night, may well be expected to be somewhat elated;" yet he would treat theatrical matters with a ludicrous slight. He mentioned one evening, "I met David coming off the stage, drest in a woman's riding-hood, when he acted in *The Wonder*. I came full upon him, and I believe he was not pleased."

Once he asked Tom Davies, whom he saw drest in a fine suit of clothes, "And what art thou to-night?" Tom answered, "The Thane of Ross;" (which it will be recollected is a very

inconsiderable character). "O brave!" said Johnson.

—*The Life*. 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's *Johnsoniana*.

Dr. Goldsmith, upon occasion of Mrs. Lennox's bringing out a play, said to Dr. Johnson at the CLUB, that a person had advised him to go and hiss it, because she had attacked Shakespeare in her book called *Shakespeare Illustrated*. JOHNSON: "And did not you tell him that he was a rascal?" GOLDSMITH: "No, Sir, I did not. Perhaps he did not mean what he said." JOHNSON: "Nay, Sir, if he lied, it is a different thing". Colman slyly said (but it is believed Dr. Johnson did not hear him), "Then the proper expression should have been,—Sir, if you don't lie, you are a rascal."

—*The Life*. 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's *Johnsoniana*.

His distinction of the different degrees of attainment of learning was thus marked upon two occasions. Of Queen Elizabeth he said, "She had learning enough to have given dignity to a bishop;" and of Mr. Thomas Davies, he said, "Sir, Davies has learning enough to give credit to a clergyman."

—*The Life*. 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's *Johnsoniana*.

Mr. Langton, when a very young man, read Dodsley's *Cleone*, a tragedy, to him, not

aware of his extreme impatience to be read to. As it went on he turned his face to the back of his chair, and put himself into various attitudes, which marked his uneasiness. At the end of an act, however, he said, "Come, let's have some more, let's go into the slaughter-house again, Lanky. But I am afraid there is more blood than brains." Yet he afterwards said, "When I heard you read it I thought higher of its power of language: when I read it myself I was more sensible of its pathetic effect;" and then he paid it a compliment which many will think very extravagant. "Sir," said he, "if Otway had written this play, no other of his pieces would have been remembered." Dodsley himself, upon this being repeated to him, said, "It was too much:" it must be remembered, that Johnson always appeared not to be sufficiently sensible of the merit of Otway.

—*The Life.* 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton's
Johnsoniana.

Drinking tea one day at Garrick's with Mr. Langton, he was questioned if he was not somewhat of a heretic as to Shakespeare; said Garrick, "I doubt he is a little of an infidel." "Sir," said Johnson, "I will stand by the lines I have written on Shakespeare in my Prologue at the opening of your theatre." Mr. Langton suggested that, in the line,

"And panting Time toil'd after him in vain,"

Johnson might have had in his eye the passage

in *The Tempest*, where Prospero says of Miranda,

“——she will outstrip all praise,
And make it halt behind her.”

Johnson said nothing. Garrick then ventured to observe, “I do not think that the happiest line in the praise of Shakespeare.” Johnson exclaimed (smiling), “Prosaical rogues! next time I write, I’ll make both time and space pant.”

—*The Life*. 1780. Mr. Bennet Langton’s
Johnsoniana.

I asked, whether a man naturally virtuous, or one who has overcome wicked inclinations, is the best. JOHNSON: “Sir, to *you*, the man who has overcome wicked inclinations is not the best. He has more merit to *himself*. I would rather trust my money to a man who has no hands, and so a physical impossibility to steal, than to a man of the most honest principles. There is a witty satirical story of Foote. He had a small bust of Garrick placed upon his bureau. ‘You may be surprised,’ said he, ‘that I allow him to be so near my gold; but, you will observe, he has no hands.’”

—*The Life*. 1783, May 26th.

He this autumn received a visit from the celebrated Mrs. Siddons. He gives this account of it in one of his letters to Mrs. Thrale, October 27th:—

“Mrs. Siddons, in her visit to me, behaved

with great modesty and propriety, and left nothing behind her to be censured or despised. Neither praise nor money, the two powerful corrupters of mankind, seemed to have depraved her. I shall be glad to see her again. Her brother Kemble calls on me, and pleases me very well. Mrs. Siddons and I talked of plays; and she told me her intention of exhibiting this winter the characters of Constance, Catharine, and Isabella, in Shakespeare."

Mr. Kemble has favoured me with the following minute of what passed at this visit:—

"When Mrs. Siddons came into the room, there happened to be no chair ready for her, which he observing, said with a smile, 'Madam, you who so often occasion a want of seats to other people, will the more easily excuse the want of one yourself.'

"Having placed himself by her, he with great good-humour entered upon a consideration of the English drama; and, among other enquiries, particularly asked her which of Shakespeare's characters she was most pleased with. Upon her answering that she thought the character of Queen Catharine in *Henry the Eighth* the most natural:—'I think so, too, Madam,' said he: 'and whenever you perform it, I will once more hobble out to the theatre myself.' Mrs. Siddons promised she would do herself the honour of acting his favourite part for him; but many circumstances happened to prevent the representation of *King Henry the Eighth* during the Doctor's life.

"In the course of the evening he thus gave

his opinion upon the merits of some of the principal performers whom he remembered to have seen upon the stage. 'Mrs. Porter in the vehemence of rage, and Mrs. Clive in the sprightliness of humour, I have never seen equalled. What Clive did best, she did better than Garrick; but could not do half so many things well; she was a better romp than any I ever saw in nature.—Pritchard, in common life, was a vulgar idiot; she would talk of her *gown*; but, when she appeared upon the stage, seemed to be inspired by gentility and understanding.—I once talked with Colley Cibber, and thought him ignorant of the principles of his art.—Garrick, Madam, was no declaimer; there was not one of his own scene-shifters who could not have spoken *To be, or not to be*, better than he did; yet he was the only actor I ever saw, whom I could call a master both in tragedy and comedy; though I liked him best in comedy. A true conception of character, and natural expression of it, were his distinguished excellencies.' Having expatiated, with his usual force and eloquence, on Mr. Garrick's extraordinary eminence as an actor, he concluded with this compliment to his social talents: 'And after all, Madam, I thought him less to be envied on the stage than at the head of a table.'"

Johnson, indeed, had thought more upon the subject of acting than might be generally supposed. Talking of it one day to Mr. Kemble, he said, "Are you, Sir, one of those enthusiasts who believe yourself transformed into the very character you represent?" Upon Mr. Kemble's

answering that he had never felt so strong a persuasion himself: "To be sure not, Sir," said Johnson, "the thing is impossible. And if Garrick really believed himself to be that monster Richard the Third, he deserved to be hanged every time he performed it."

—*The Life*. 1783, Autumn.



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